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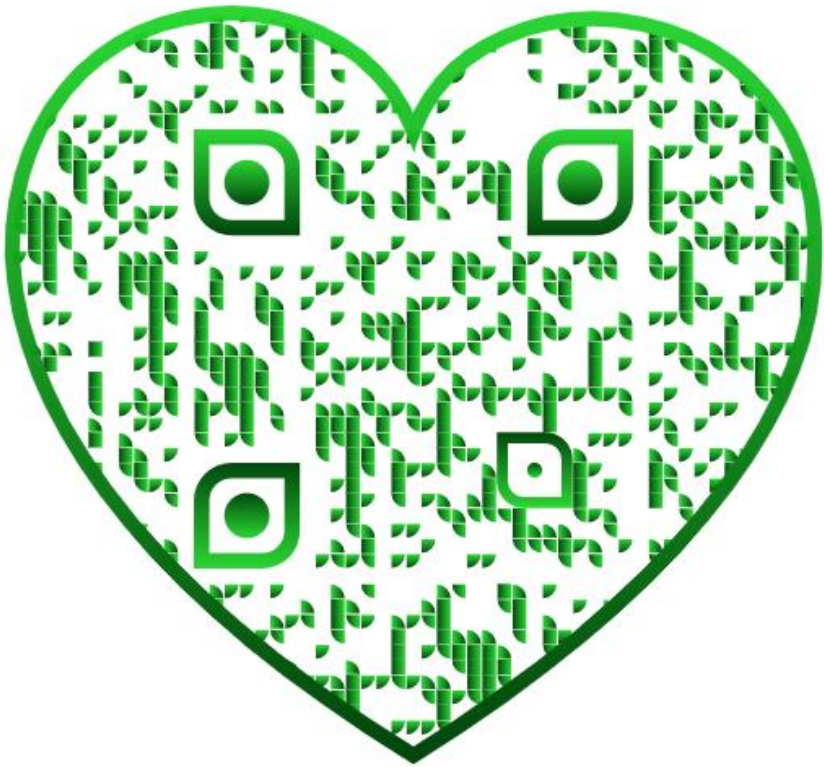
VISHNUSHARMA

Panchatantra

INTRODUCTION BY NILANJANA S. ROY



VISHNU SHARMA

Panchatantra

Translated from the Sanskrit by Rohini Chowdhury

Introduction By Nilanjana S. Roy

PUFFIN BOOKS

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Introduction

Strange things, stories. They seem so harmless—words on a page, pinned flat in a book. You would laugh if someone said to you, 'Stories are alive, did you know? As alive as you, or me—and be careful around them, they're older than us.'

But it's true. Many years ago, I read the stories in the *Panchatantra* for the first time. I swear I'd never read about Sanjivaka the bull and Pingalaka the lion, or about the jackal and the drum, or the dainty little mouse-maiden before. Halfway through, I felt my neck prickle with a creepy sense of familiarity. I hadn't read these ancient stories, written centuries ago, in print—but I knew them already.

There are two explanations for this. Because the *Panchatantra* is so famous, one explanation, the easy one, is that I had overheard someone telling someone else these stories. This was in the days before everyone had a television set at home, so people had a lot of different ways to fill the evening hours. They sang songs, the sensible ones went out and climbed trees, and the others stayed home and told stories.

So yes, it's always possible that I had heard them before, perhaps even seen paintings from the *Panchatantra* in some friend's house, but forgotten that I had heard or seen these very old stories. That must be why I felt I knew them. Except that I was the kind of child who liked stories a lot. I forgot people's faces, often. I forgot my homework (all right, sometimes that was on purpose). I forgot to eat my breakfast (not when it was yummy, though). But I never forgot song lyrics, or books I had read, or stories I had heard. Never ever.

There is another possibility—the second explanation. If you believe, really believe, that stories are alive, then I must tell you also that the older a story is, and the longer it's lasted, the more powerful it becomes. This is not so hard to believe. Storytelling and writing are magic. You take the same twenty-six letters of the alphabet everyone gets, and you make something that will live inside people's heads for a very long time indeed—that is magic, making something out of nothing. So, old stories, the kind that have lived in the heads of many humans, across many centuries, for longer than we can imagine, carry

the most potent magic of all. The truly magical stories, the old ones, the unforgettable ones? Maybe, just maybe, they already live inside your head. You're shaking your head right now, thinking, 'Mmm-hmmm, nope. Not in *my* head, they don't.'

But consider this. The *Panchatantra* is very, very old. No one knows exactly how old, but some experts who've spent years studying manuscripts and storytelling and other important subjects, think that Pandit Vishnusharma might have written it in the third century CE. That's a lot of centuries. Now consider this, too: you have roughly four human generations in each century. I hope you like maths, because this is a fun exercise that you can do on your own—count the number of centuries between our time and the third century CE, and multiply by four. That big number you're looking at? That is the number of human generations the *Panchatantra* has reached over time.

Stories are alive, fiercely so. No one knows why one cycle of stories —maybe something that the Neanderthals told each other under a star-filled sky—splutters out in one generation, never crossing over to other centuries. No one knows why these stories from the third century CE to ours have survived, what makes them special enough to be read, and remembered, and rewritten by one generation of humanity after another. Once you believe that some stories have a powerful life-force, here's the other thing that becomes apparent: some stories like to travel.

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One of the most beautiful illustrated pages I've seen comes from an ancient manuscript called *Kalila-wa-Dimna*. It shows a rocky but beautiful landscape, with trees and shrubs and pretty flying birds above the grey rock. Inside the stone, cut away by the clever painter, encased in velvet under-the-ground blackness, lies a beautiful red jackal, Dimna, reaching out his paws to his brother, Kalila, asking to be freed from his imprisonment.* It is known as *Calila e Dimna* in Castile, and is read around all of the Arab world in Urdu, Persian and other languages—the two jackals, Kalila and Dimna, are from the *Panchatantra*, and take centrestage in these retellings. How did two jackals from India sail across to the Arab world, taking these tales with them?

In a few hundred years, the *Panchatantra* had acquired a reputation. Across the traders' routes, carried by caravans and spice merchants, shipped along with other cargo, the *Panchatantra*'s fame had started to

spread. The king of kings, Anushirwan the Just, who ruled over the Sassanian Empire in Iran around 501–579 CE, heard from travellers of these Sanskrit tales from India. It was said that these stories would teach rulers wisdom, cunning and more. Anushirwan sent his physician-vizier, Barzoi, to bring back medicines from India—along with the equally powerful medicine embedded in these tales. From Sanskrit, the old stories found their way into the Iranian language of Pahlavi.

A powerful lesson: books are fragile, paper is easily lost, manuscripts can be destroyed, what you write on the Internet can't be found five years from now. But stories have a way of surviving—against the odds, as empires rise and fall, and the centuries pass, and ancient libraries are lost, these stories stayed alive.

I've never been very comfortable with the animals in the *Panchatantra*. They speak and think like humans, and they make evil plans or extract revenge like humans. But why didn't the author just write human stories, then?

Because the *Panchatantra*'s jackals and lions, bulls and monkeys, swans and owls don't need to be all that bird-or-animal-like—since they are creatures from fable, meant to be neither human, nor animal. And fable is a completely different country. It's where you put the stories that float between the world of the forest and the kingdom—or in our times, city and the wilderness.

Animals in fables are like us—friendly, curious, generous, but also greedy, cunning, jealous—but with their wild side exaggerated, so that in them, we can see more clearly that 'human' is just another animal in the forests of the world. The animals in the *Panchatantra* are not like any animal I know, and I've made friends with plenty in my lifetime—but that forest they occupy?—it's very familiar, as beautiful and as filled with hidden dangers as any city you know.

The fable forest has troubles, and pitfalls, and old wells and rivers that contain lions and crocodiles. Stories tumble out from every corner in fables, teaching you how to stay alive in the jungle, whom to make friends with, how to survive, and sometimes, how to be good and generous while you do all of this.

Perhaps the *Panchatantra* has lasted because you're not really looking for sweet, light fun when you turn to stories. You think you are, but the truth is that a story that began with, 'They were the happiest people in the world . . .' and went on to say, ' . . . and they did many happy things every single day', and ended with '. . . and they lived happily ever after', would be one of the most boring stories

ever.

What do you want when you come to stories? Happy endings, yes—but also, just maybe, stories that teach you how the weak might sometimes win against the strong, or that remind you that forests have dark places, and wild creatures cannot be tamed.

Some of the stories in the *Panchatantra* are scary, and some are shocking, because the creatures in it are neither nice nor good. Sometimes the rabbit wins—sometimes a monkey goes too far, and it loses. Sometimes the lion is the hero; sometimes he's the wicked evil monster whom everyone hates. But over the centuries, the animals and the old dark woods they come from have survived in our hearts and our minds. Part of this is because of the storyteller's skill—they nested the stories, like boxes, so that just when you're getting bored with one story, another one starts up. And part of this might be because something deep inside us, the wild part of our selves, the part that doesn't belong in a city but remembers caves, jungles, open skies, responds to something deep inside the *Panchatantra* itself.

I don't know what exactly the magic is that took the *Panchatantra* halfway across the ancient and modern worlds, and made it so influential that you can catch echoes from it even in today's Disney and Pixar films. But it is ancient magic, and I suspect these stories will stay alive centuries from now, continuing to hop from one human mind to another down generations yet unborn.

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Prologue

Long ago, in a kingdom in the south, lay the fair city of Mahilaropya, where ruled the good king Amarashakti. Raja Amarashakti was a just and generous king, and wise and learned as well. He was loved by his people, and revered by kings and princes all over the world.

Raja Amarashakti had three sons—the princes Bahushakti, Ugrashakti and Anantashakti. The three boys were the bane of their father's life. Lazy and foolish, they showed no desire to study, and were as unlike their father as could be. The king employed tutor after tutor, engaged teacher after teacher, but it was no use—the princes refused to learn and remained illiterate boors. At last, at his wits' end, the king called an emergency meeting of his council of ministers.

'My beloved sons are ignorant blockheads,' said the king to his ministers, not mincing his words. 'They have neither wit nor wisdom, and lie around all day like three useless lumps of clay. I have employed the best teachers and spent copious amounts of gold and silver on their education, but the boys refuse to learn. I am known the world over for my wisdom. My court is full of clever men. Poets, philosophers and thinkers come here from far and wide. But my sons are my shame and despair! It is an intolerable situation!' The king paced agitatedly up and down the throne room several times. 'You, ministers, are the cleverest men in my kingdom!' he declared. 'So tell me now—what can we do to educate these moron sons of mine?'

The ministers shuffled their feet and looked at the floor. Educating the princes? That was impossible. They all knew that. The king would have more success educating three blocks of stone! After a few minutes of uncomfortable wriggling, one of the ministers plucked up his courage enough to speak. 'Oh king,' he said, 'learning is like a banyan tree—it does not spring up overnight, but takes years and years to grow.'

'There is so much to learn,' added another. 'For instance, grammar, which alone takes twelve years to master . . .'

'And law, which takes even longer,' said a third.

'And philosophy . . . and economics,' chimed in a fourth.

'And the sciences . . . and mathematics,' declared a fifth.

‘And then the arts,’ counted a sixth.

‘Therefore, as your Highness can see . . .’ said the seventh with a sigh.

‘Educating the princes is an impossible task!’ concluded the eighth. He was especially doleful and especially triumphant.

The king looked sadly at his ministers. Was it truly his destiny to have foolish and ignorant sons? Just then, another minister stepped forward and begged to speak. This was Sumati, a man known for his common sense and practical approach to life. He had been thinking hard while the other ministers had been sighing and moaning.

‘Speak then,’ said Amarashakti, not really expecting a solution.

‘O king,’ said Sumati, ‘it is true that knowledge takes many years to acquire, but true knowledge does not come from learning the rules of grammar, the points of law, or even by mastering one or all of the many branches of learning. True knowledge must be distilled and extracted from life itself. The princes do not need years and years of lessons. Instead, they need a new method of learning, and a teacher who can open their minds and guide them towards worldly wisdom.’

‘And do you know of such a teacher?’ asked the king hopefully.

Sumati nodded. ‘Yes, sire. His name is Vishnusharma. He is an experienced teacher of great renown, and, what’s more, he lives here, in our own city of Mahilaropya.’

The king wasted no more time, but summoned Vishnusharma to the palace at once, and when the old teacher stood before him, he greeted him with folded hands. ‘Your fame as a teacher has reached my ears, O Vishnusharma, and I have called you here to educate my three sons,’ said the king. ‘The princes are ignorant louts. If you can turn them into wise and learned men, I will give you a hundred villages in reward, and you shall never want for anything in your life.’

‘O king,’ replied Vishnusharma, ‘I will not sell learning, not even for a hundred villages. I am now eighty years old. At my age, I am not interested in wealth and have no need for it. But to fulfil your wishes, I will tutor your sons in how to live wisely and well. Within six months from now, I will make your sons learned beyond all. And if I fail to do so, you may sentence me to death and bar my way to heaven!’

Raja Amarashakti, somewhat taken aback at Vishnusharma’s words, but relieved and hopeful as well, entrusted his sons to his care.

Then Vishnusharma, to educate the three princes, devised the stories of the *Panchatantra*. The three princes were captivated by his tales of wit and practical wisdom and within six months, had become

knowledgeable and wise young men, just as Vishnusharma had promised.

Since then, the *Panchatantra* has become known throughout the world and is used to teach, simply and quickly, practical wisdom to young people and to awaken in them curiosity and a desire to learn about the world.

Part 1

The Falling Out of Friends

Vishnusharma said to the three princes, 'I will now begin the first part of your lessons, on how friends may be lost and friendships broken. Listen then to the story of the lion and the bull and their growing friendship that was destroyed by a wicked and greedy jackal. Now listen, this is how it happened.'

The Story of Sanjivaka the Bull and Pingalaka the Lion

It has been heard that in the city of Mahilaropya, there lived a merchant called Vardhamana. He was an honest and intelligent man, and had grown very rich through his keen understanding of business and trade.

One night, as he lay in bed, he began to think, 'I am already a very wealthy man with bags and bags of money and jewels, gold and silver. Even so, I must try to earn some more. If a man is rich, everyone wants to be his friend and even his relatives love him. A rich man can buy learning and health and even youth. But if a man is poor, then even his own family avoids him! So, instead of sitting idle, I must continue to work and add to my great wealth!' Vardhamana sat up in bed and stared into the dark, thinking hard of all the ways in which he could make more money.

At last, after scratching his head for a long time, he came up with an idea. 'I have seen,' said he to himself, 'that merchants who take their goods to distant lands sell them there for many times their cost. So I will carry goods from my own city of Mahilaropya to the faraway city of Mathura in the north. There I will sell my merchandise for a large profit. This will also give me an excuse to travel and see the world.' Vardhamana was very pleased with his idea and even though the sun had not yet risen, he hopped out of bed and began busily planning his trip.

Over the next few days, Vardhamana gathered together the goods he thought would sell well in Mathura. When he had enough things to sell, he loaded them on to his cart and made ready for his journey.

Now, Vardhamana owned two beautiful bulls, Sanjivaka and Nandaka. The two animals had been born in Vardhamana's house, and had been cared for and brought up as part of the family. Vardhamana loved them dearly; he did not want to leave them behind. So, deciding to take them with him to Mathura, he yoked them to the loaded cart. When all was ready, he bade goodbye to his parents and set off on his journey, joining a caravan of merchants that was going the same way.

All went well for a while. Then one day, as Vardhamana and his

party were passing through a forest close to the River Yamuna, Sanjivaka floundered in a patch of soft wet mud and fell, breaking the yoke. Vardhamana was distraught. 'I can't leave my beloved Sanjivaka lying stuck and helpless in the mud,' he declared, and calling a halt, he ordered his men to set up camp right there in the forest, beside the injured bull. For three days, he waited by Sanjivaka's side, hoping that the bull would recover and stand up again. But Sanjivaka still lay where he had fallen.

The other merchants in whose company Vardhamana was travelling grew restless. Finally, one of them went up to him. 'Seth ji,' he said, calling him by the title by which wealthy merchants are often addressed, 'you cannot risk your life and those of your companions for the sake of one injured animal. Who knows how many hungry lions or ferocious tigers are lurking in this forest? It is not safe to wait here any longer.'

Vardhamana realized that the man was right—he could not put the others in danger because of Sanjivaka. Sadly, he agreed to resume his journey. Leaving behind some men to look after Sanjivaka and instructing them to protect him from the forest animals, Vardhamana continued towards Mathura with the rest of his companions.

Vardhamana's men watched over Sanjivaka for a day. Then they said to themselves, 'This forest is frightening, and as dangerous for us as it was for the master and the others. Why should we stay here, risking our lives for an injured animal?' And abandoning Sanjivaka, they ran off through the forest to join the others.

On the second day, they caught up with Vardhamana's party. They knew that Vardhamana would be furious if he knew that they had left Sanjivaka at the mercy of the forest. So, to save their skins, they decided to lie. 'O sir, Sanjivaka is dead; he died of his injuries where he lay,' they said, putting on long, sad faces. 'We know that you loved him very much, so we gave him a funeral and cremated him as you would have wished.' Vardhamana, heartbroken, believed their lies, and thinking there was nothing more to be done, continued on to Mathura.

Meanwhile, Sanjivaka was far from dead. Slowly, his injuries healed, till at last, he could pull himself out of the mud. He wandered through the forest until he reached the banks of the River Yamuna. Here grew fresh, green grass, sweet and juicy, such as Sanjivaka had never eaten before in his life. Day by day, Sanjivaka regained his strength, till he became as healthy, strong and beautiful as the white bull of Lord Shiva himself. He began to live happily by the river.

Sometimes, when he had nothing to do, he would amuse himself by charging the anthills by the river's edge and loudly bellowing his victory as they toppled over, helpless before his mighty horns.

It has been said, and rightly so, that

One protected by destiny
Will live even if left to die
One abandoned by his fate
Will die even in safety great.

One day, a lion named Pingalaka, accompanied by his retinue of faithful followers, came down to the river for a drink. While still some distance away from the river, Pingalaka heard a strange and alarming sound—a roaring deep and powerful such as he had never heard before. This was only Sanjivaka the bull bellowing happily at the anthills. But Pingalaka did not know that. Too far away to see the bull, he decided that it must be a fierce monster by the water's edge making that terrifying sound.

Pingalaka had never been so scared in his life! But he was the king of the forest after all, and, as king, he could not let the other animals see how frightened he was. At the same time, he dared not go down to the river! So, pretending to be thinking deeply on a matter of great importance, he retreated to the shade of a large banyan tree and sat down. His faithful followers arranged themselves around him in order of rank and importance.

In Pingalaka's retinue were two jackals, called Karataka and Damanaka. Their fathers had once been ministers to the king, but these two had not been given the same office. The two jackals were friends and spent much of their time discussing ways and means to gain Pingalaka's favour. Seeing the lion sitting still under the banyan tree, the two put their heads together and began talking.

'Karataka,' began Damanaka, 'our king came down to the river for a drink. So why does he not go down to the water, and why does he sit, so still and frightened, under that tree?'

'Damanaka,' replied Karataka, 'what concern is it of ours what Pingalaka does? We should not poke our nose into his affairs.'

'Why not?'

'Because it has been said, and rightly so,' continued Karataka,

That he who interferes unasked
Or meddles with another's task

Meets an end that's grim and gory
Quite devoid of grace or glory.'

'How so?' asked Damanaka, interested.

So Karataka told him the story of the meddlesome monkey.

The Story of the Meddlesome Monkey

Once upon a time, a rich merchant decided to build a large temple in a forest close to the town where he lived. He had many sins on his conscience and hoped that by building the temple he would please the gods so much that they would forgive his crimes. He spared no expense, using only the best wood and the finest stone and employing only the most skilled carpenters and stonemasons to build his temple. The men worked all day long without rest or pause—except every day at noon, when they would lay down their tools and go into the town for a break and a bite to eat.

One bright, sunny day, while the workers were away, a troop of monkeys chanced upon the temple site. Seeing that the place was empty and deserted, the monkeys scampered down from the trees and began playing amidst the half-built pillars and porticos of the temple. They danced and pranced and jumped about, and had a wonderful time.

One monkey, as he ran and jumped about, came upon a half-split log of wood. Now, the carpenter who had been working upon that log had driven a stout wedge into the split—he planned to come back from his lunch and continue with his work of sawing the log in half.

The monkey had never seen anything as strange as this before, and being more inquisitive and meddlesome than the others, he decided to investigate. Perching himself upon the log, he began to ease loose the carpenter's wedge. It is difficult to say why he did this—perhaps his life upon this earth was done, for as the wedge popped out, the slit in the log snapped shut, trapping the monkey.

It is best not to dwell on the painful death he died.

'And so you see, Damanaka, it is best not to interfere in concerns that are not our own,' concluded Karataka. 'After all, we get enough food to fill our bellies from the lion's leftovers. What more do we need?'

But Damanaka disagreed. 'It seems you live only to eat, Karataka,' he protested. 'That is not right, not for intelligent creatures like you and me! We need to aim for the higher things in life!'

'Like what?' asked Karataka, puzzled.

‘Like power and status, my friend! Like royal patronage and favour!’ cried Damanaka. ‘We need to get close to the king, and then cleverly get him to trust us and make us ministers, like our fathers were!’

Karataka shook his head—Damanaka could be such a dreamer at times. ‘Dear Damanaka,’ he said, ‘you forget, we are nobody, just two jobless hangers-on of the royal train. Yes, it’s true that our fathers used to be amongst Pingalaka’s trusted people once, but those days are over. Who will let you get near the king? And even if you manage to reach him, why will he listen to you?’

‘Oh, come on! Have a little faith in me!’ declared Damanaka. ‘Brains and quick thinking can achieve many things. See how frightened Pingalaka is? I can tell just by looking at him. All I have to do is to find out what is scaring him, and then get him to trust me by getting rid either of that thing or his fear.’

‘How are you so sure that you will win Pingalaka’s trust?’ protested Karataka, ‘He is the king after all, and a large and powerful lion to boot. You are just a jackal.’

‘Yes, just a jackal,’ said Damanaka, ‘but a clever one! Now raise no more objections, and watch me work my magic! Our days of poverty and hardship are over.’ And Damanaka stepped forward and walked confidently towards Pingalaka.

Pingalaka, who was still sitting under the banyan tree surrounded by his ministers and guards, saw the jackal coming towards him. With a regal nod of his massive head he indicated to the guards that they should let Damanaka through. ‘His father used to be one of my trusted men,’ said Pingalaka, ‘and for his father’s sake, I will listen to what he has to say.’

Damanaka greeted the king and said, ‘O king, I have something important to ask you.’

Pingalaka placed a huge and benign paw on Damanaka’s head and said, ‘As your father’s son, ask what you wish to.’

‘Sire,’ said Damanaka, bowing low, ‘the question I wish to ask concerns the king alone. It would be better if it remains a secret between you and me and is not heard by anyone else.’

At Damanaka’s words, the wolf, the hyena and the tiger moved away to give the king his privacy. The more curious and foolish animals, who did not move away, were shooed off by the royal guards. Finally, when everyone was safely out of earshot, Damanaka put his mouth close to the lion’s ear and spoke in a low voice. ‘Majesty,’ he said, ‘you had come down to the river for a drink of water to slake your thirst. Why, then, are you sitting here?’

Pingalaka, hiding his fear, said with a careless laugh, ‘No reason really, I’m sitting here . . . just . . . for no reason at all.’

Damanaka nodded wisely, as though he understood it all. Still keeping his voice low, he said, ‘King, if it is a secret matter, then let it be. Do not speak of it, even to me, for it is said and rightly so

Sometimes it is best to keep
Some matters secret, hidden deep
Even from a loving wife, a loyal son, or faithful friend
The wise even if so besought,
Will not reveal their inmost thoughts
Without careful consideration
Of what they speak
To whom they speak,
And how and where and when.’

And Damanaka drew back with a show of great respect, as though honouring the king’s secret.

Pingalaka was impressed by Damanaka’s manner. ‘This Damanaka seems to be a trustworthy sort of fellow,’ thought he to himself. ‘Maybe I will tell him of my secret fear, and lighten the load on my mind.’ And turning to the jackal, he said, ‘Damanaka, my friend, I want to leave this forest and go away to another.’

‘Why?’ asked Damanaka.

‘Can you hear that deep bellow in the distance?’

‘Yes, I can. What of it?’

‘Well,’ said Pingalaka, ‘it seems that some fearsome beast has come to live in this forest. Any creature with a voice so deep and dreadful must be very dangerous.’

‘Sire,’ answered Damanaka, ‘that bellow is only a sound. You should not be frightened of it. How do you know what or who is making that sound? Do not lose heart, O king. This forest is your kingdom, your home, which you have inherited from your forefathers. It is not right that you should leave it only for fear of a sound. There are so many different sounds in the forest, and this bellow that we hear could be anything. Stay steadfast, O king, because once

Looking at this thing I thought,
It would be full of meat and blood;
Later, looking at it closely,
It was only skin and wood.’

‘Really? How was that?’ asked Pingalaka with interest.

And Damanaka told Pingalaka the story of the jackal and the drum.

The Story of the Jackal and the Drum

Once, a jackal called Gomayu was wandering through the forest in search of food. He had not had a good meal in days, and was desperately hungry. In a remote corner of the forest, he came upon a forgotten battlefield, where once two armies had fought and died. The battlefield lay deserted now, though the ground was still strewn with the debris of war.

Gomayu looked around him with interest. Perhaps he would be able to find something to eat here. Even an old bone or two would do. All at once he heard a sound—a deep, booming rumble such as he had never heard before. Gomayu jumped and trembled with fear. 'Hai, what sound is that?' he cried. 'It must be a monster who will eat me in a bite! I better get out of here as quickly as I can!' And turning around, he made to run back into the trees. 'But, wait a minute,' he then said to himself, 'why should I run away? After all, I am a reasonably clever fellow and I am sure I can work out who or what is making this sound. Maybe I don't need to be frightened at all.' And Gomayu turned back towards the battlefield.

He made his way carefully across the field, stepping gingerly through the broken swords and spears that were strewn all over the ground, till at last he saw what was making that deep and frightening rumble. It was a huge old battle drum, lying where it had fallen, amongst the grass and bushes. Every time a gust of wind shook the branches of a nearby tree, they tapped against the face of the drum, and the drum boomed and rumbled. Otherwise it lay still and silent.

Gomayu heaved a sigh of relief. This was no fierce beast. He went closer and tapped it with his paw. At once the drum gave out a loud rumble. 'This thing is so round and fat, I am sure it must be stuffed full of meat and blood,' thought the jackal. 'Ah, I am so hungry—something to eat at last!' And forgetting his fears of a moment ago, he fell upon the drum and began to gnaw and chew till at last he had made a hole in the drum's side.

He peered through the hole expecting a feast, but the drum was as empty as his tummy.

The jackal shook his head in disappointment. 'How silly of me,' he

thought. ‘How could I imagine that there would be food lying around for me to find? This is no fearsome beast, no magic larder. It is just a silly old drum!’ And laughing at his own foolishness, he turned around and ran off into the forest.

‘And that is why I say,’ concluded Damanaka, ‘that the king should not be afraid of a mere sound.’

‘That’s easy for you to say,’ growled Pingalaka. ‘Just look at my followers—even the bravest amongst them are terrified and waiting to run away from this terrible roaring. So how can I not be afraid too?’

‘Sire,’ said Damanaka, ‘followers take their cue from their master. Your followers are afraid because you are afraid. If you show courage, so will they. Let me go and see what is making this racket before you decide to leave the forest.’

‘Do you really want to go near that awful sound?’ asked Pingalaka. ‘What if it is dangerous?’

‘O king,’ replied Damanaka, ‘a faithful subject does not hesitate in the service of his king, no matter how great the danger. So give me leave to go and investigate the source of your worry.’

Pingalaka was deeply touched by the jackal’s apparent loyalty. ‘My friend,’ he said, ‘if you wish to go, then do so. May your path be safe and pleasant.’

Damanaka took his leave of the king and ran off through the trees towards the river. He had been gone barely a few seconds when Pingalaka began to worry. ‘Maybe I wasn’t very wise to confide in the jackal,’ he fretted. ‘What if he betrays me to that fierce creature? What will I do then? After all, I did not make him a minister as I did his father. What if Damanaka is angry with me and brings that fierce beast here to kill me? Maybe I should move away from under this tree, so that when he returns he cannot find me. After all, it has been said, and rightly so, that

The watchful and wary,
Though feeble and weak
May triumph over a mighty foe;
The confiding and trusting,
Though sturdy and strong
May lose to a lesser adversary.’

And Pingalaka moved away from the banyan tree to a spot a little distance away, from where he could keep a careful lookout for

Damanaka's return.

Meanwhile, Damanaka had followed the dreadful roaring to the river's edge, where he saw Sanjivaka charging playfully at the anthills and bellowing happily as he did so. Damanaka soon realized that the large white bull was harmless, and a plan began to form in his scheming mind. 'I will introduce the bull to the lion and make sure they become friends, and then I will make trouble between them so that the friendship ends. Pingalaka will turn to me for help, and I will play the role of wise advisor till Pingalaka is completely under my influence!' he plotted. Grinning gleefully, he made his way back to the banyan tree where he had left Pingalaka.

Pingalaka, waiting for the jackal's return, saw Damanaka returning through the trees. No fierce beast accompanied him. Taking heart from Damanaka's solitary approach, Pingalaka ran back to the banyan tree and, gathering his followers about him once more, sat down and waited for Damanaka as though he had never moved from the spot. Damanaka saluted the king and sat down without a word.

'Well?' demanded Pingalaka, looking at the silent Damanaka. 'Did you see the fierce creature that is making those sounds?'

'Yes, sire, I have seen him,' answered Damanaka.

'Are you telling me the truth?' Pingalaka looked disbelievingly at the jackal. Had he really seen the beast and still managed to escape with his life?

'O king, would I lie to you?' protested Damanaka.

Pingalaka frowned in thought. No, Damanaka would not lie to him, he would not dare, for he was the king after all and the jackal was just . . . a jackal. 'All right, Damanaka, I believe you—you've seen him. I don't wish to argue with you. And anyway, the strong do not attack the weak—which is why the fierce monster probably let you live,' he said, somewhat testily.

'Sire, you are right,' said Damanaka humbly. 'I am just a weak and lowly jackal. Yet, if you wish, I can bring that fierce animal to you, to be your willing servant and follower.'

'Can you truly do that? How?' asked Pingalaka doubtfully.

'O king, nothing is difficult for one who uses his intelligence,' replied Damanaka.

'If you can really bring him to me,' said Pingalaka, 'I will appoint you minister, and you shall handle all the tasks related to rewards and punishments!'

Delighted, Damanaka ran as fast as he could to the river where Sanjivaka was still busy charging the anthills and bellowing happily.

‘Hey, you! Come here!’ called Damanaka to the bull in a loud voice. ‘King Pingalaka wants you. He wishes to know why you are making such a row in this quiet and peaceful forest!’

Sanjivaka stopped what he was doing and, puzzled, looked around to see who had spoken. He saw the jackal standing a little way away, and, greeting him politely, asked, ‘Friend, who is this Pingalaka you speak of?’

‘Don’t you know our king, the magnificent lion, Pingalaka?’ cried Damanaka, pretending shock and surprise. ‘If you carry on making this dreadful racket, you’ll find out who he is soon enough! He is the lord of this forest and the king of all the animals! And at this very moment, he is sitting surrounded by his faithful followers under that banyan tree!’

Sanjivaka grew weak with terror. A lion! And a strong and powerful one too! Maybe the lion had summoned him to kill him for disturbing his rest! Convinced that he was about to die, Sanjivaka addressed the jackal in a voice trembling with fear. ‘Friend, you seem to be a good and generous person, and one who speaks well and kindly too!’ he said. ‘If you must take me to your king, then I will come—but first, please beg the king on my behalf to grant me safe-conduct.’

Damanaka pretended to think for a moment. ‘Very well,’ he said at last, ‘I will ask the king for his promise that he will not harm you in any way. It is wise of you to ask the king to guarantee your safety, because it is true that while we may measure the ocean’s depth and the mountain’s soaring peak, we cannot truly fathom a king’s thoughts and feelings. Wait for me right here. I will run to the king and back, to find out what mood he is in, and then take you with me to see him.’

Leaving a worried Sanjivaka by the river, Damanaka ran back to Pingalaka. Pretending to be very agitated, he said, ‘O king, that creature you hear by the river is no ordinary animal. He is Lord Shiva’s bull, Nandi himself! The great god Shiva has given the entire forest to him, to live in and to do what he pleases! He told me so himself!’

Pingalaka grew even more frightened than before. ‘That explains it!’ he cried. ‘Now I understand why he is roaming around so freely in this forest, attracting attention to himself with all his bellowing, unafraid of the lions for whom he is such easy prey!’ He shook his head worriedly. ‘So what did you say to him when he told you who he was?’ he asked.

‘Sire,’ said Damanaka, ‘I told him that this forest was the kingdom of the mighty lion Pingalaka, steed of the fierce goddess Chandika

herself, and that he, the bull, was our guest. I invited him to join you, sire, for a friendly meal and chat. The bull agreed readily and with pleasure, but has asked for safe-conduct to come into your presence. Now it is up to you to do as you please, O king.'

'That was clever of you!' cried Pingalaka, greatly relieved. 'You said exactly what I might have said myself had I been there! You deserve a medal! I grant the bull my protection and safety from all harm. But Damanaka, ask him to give the same to me: a guarantee that he will not harm me. And then bring him here with respect and honour.'

Damanaka ran back to Sanjivaka, extremely pleased with himself. 'My plan is working well,' he thought. 'Pingalaka has begun to trust me and rely on me, and even wants to reward me! I am the luckiest creature on earth, for hasn't it been said that honour and recognition from the king come only to the fortunate?'

The jackal smiled slyly to himself, and reaching the riverbank where Sanjivaka waited anxiously, called to the bull in the sweetest of voices, 'Friend, I have obtained safe-conduct for you from the king. Now you may go to him without any fear. And when you have gained Pingalaka's royal favour, remember me, your friend in times of need. As for me, I too will carry out my duties as minister only after consulting you. Working together, you and I, we could rule this forest! But remember, if you forget me, you could lose everything, despite the king's favour, for it is well known that

Dantila Seth was rich and worthy
Beloved of his king
He treated Gorambha shamefully
And lost fortune, friends and name.'

'Why, how did that happen?' asked Sanjivaka.

So Damanaka related the story of Dantila and Gorambha.

The Story of Dantila and Gorambha

Once, in the rich and prosperous city of Bardhaman, there lived a wealthy jeweller called Dantila who was also the governor of the city. He was a popular man—the people loved him because he was a fair and just governor, and the king liked him because he was efficient and trustworthy.

Now, Dantila had a daughter whom he loved dearly and who was soon to be married. Dantila decided to celebrate his daughter's wedding with a great feast to which he invited every single person in the city of Bardhaman. Rich and poor, high and low, king, courtier and common man, all were made welcome at the wedding.

Amongst the guests was a poor man called Gorambha. His job was to keep the floors of the king's palace spotless and shining, and all day long he swept and swabbed and polished. When Gorambha entered the great hall where the wedding was to be, he was overcome by awe. He had never seen a wedding so grand—not even the king's palace where he worked had so many glittering lights. Dazzled by the splendour, his head spinning, he sat down with a thud upon the first empty seat he could find. Unfortunately for Gorambha, the seat he had plonked himself upon had been reserved for the priest who was to perform the wedding rites!

When Dantila saw him sitting there, he was furious. He stormed up to Gorambha and, grabbing him unceremoniously by the collar, threw him out of the door. Gorambha's face burned with humiliation, and, shocked and angry, he returned to the palace.

All night long, Gorambha brooded upon the rude and unjust manner in which Dantila had treated him. 'I will teach that ill-mannered and arrogant merchant a lesson!' he declared, and after much thinking, he came up with a sly and cunning plan to get Dantila into trouble.

The next morning, as the sun rose over the city, the king lay half-awake, half-asleep upon his royal bed. Gorambha, armed with his broom and duster, entered the king's bedroom and began to busily sweep the floor. As he moved about with his broom, he muttered to himself, 'Dantila loves the queen, Dantila loves the queen.' Of course, this was quite untrue, but it had exactly the effect that Gorambha had

intended.

The king heard his muttering and sprang out of bed, now quite fully awake. ‘What? What did you say?’ he cried, grabbing Gorambha and shaking him. ‘Did you say that Dantila loves the queen?’

‘Ah no, sire, no! Pay no heed to my words! I am asleep on my feet! I was up all night, gambling! And in my sleep, I don’t know what I may have said!’ stuttered Gorambha, and wriggling out of the king’s grasp, scuttled out of the room.

The king, furious, banished Dantila from his court. ‘Make sure the scoundrel never enters the royal palace again!’ he cried to his guards.

Dantila heard of his banishment. ‘There must be some terrible mistake,’ he said to himself, and set off for the palace to see the king. But when he reached there, the palace guards barred his way. They would not let him enter, no matter how much he begged or pleaded.

Gorambha, who was watching gleefully from a palace window, called out to the guards. ‘Be careful, friends! Dantila is a great man, the king loves him and so do the people. He has the power to punish and reward, so be careful how you cross him! If you anger him, he will throw you out!’

Dantila recognized Gorambha and understood at once that it was Gorambha who had turned the king against him! He returned home, deep in thought, and summoned Gorambha to him there. This time he treated Gorambha like an honoured guest, presented him with a costly suit of clothes and served him the finest dishes his cooks could prepare. ‘Friend Gorambha,’ he said, ‘I am very sorry for all that happened here. I did not throw you out in anger. It was just that you took the priest’s chair, and, afraid that he might be offended, I foolishly behaved as I did. Friend Gorambha, will you please forgive me? I acted without thinking.’

Gorambha was a man who forgave as quickly as he took offence. ‘Now wait and see how I restore you to the king’s favour,’ he declared.

Next morning at sunrise, as the king lay half awake, half asleep upon the royal bed, Gorambha once more entered with his broom, and began to busily sweep the floor. As before, he muttered to himself as he swept and swabbed. ‘Our king’s disgusting! He eats cucumbers while sitting on the royal privy seat,’ repeated Gorambha over and over again.

The king sprang up, all sleep forgotten. ‘Hey, Gorambha!’ he cried, grabbing him by his collar and shaking him. ‘What did you say? That I eat cucumbers while sitting on the royal potty?’

‘No, no, sire, no! Pay no heed to my words! I am asleep on my feet!

I was up all night, gambling! And in my sleep, I don't know what I may have said!' stuttered Gorambha as before and, wriggling out of the king's grasp, went back to sweeping the room.

'Hmff! What a strange fellow!' thought the king, grumpily. 'He walks around while asleep and mutters about things he knows nothing of! Me? Eat cucumbers? That is preposterous! I *never* eat cucumbers! And that too while seated on the royal potty! The fellow is quite mad!' He glared balefully at Gorambha who was still industriously sweeping the royal floor.

The king was terribly upset by Gorambha's mutterings. Agitated and annoyed, he paced up and down the royal bedchamber. 'So, if what he mumbles in his sleep is not true—because clearly it isn't—then maybe I have done Dantila wrong?' asked the king of himself. 'Maybe Dantila does not love the queen at all?' The more he thought about it, the more he realized how silly he had been to believe the sleepy mutterings of an idiot. 'I must get Dantila back,' he decided. 'This city has never had a better governor, nor I a more trusted officer!'

Feeling foolish and contrite, the king summoned Dantila, gave him a gift of clothes and called him his 'trusted friend'. Dantila, restored once more to the king's favour, regained his former glory. Once again, he became the most important man in the city, loved and respected by all.

'So, do you see how easily even the great may fall, if they ignore those who serve the king?' asked Damanaka, concluding his tale.

'Yes, I understand,' nodded Sanjivaka meekly. 'I will do as you say.'

'Come on, then. Pingalaka does not like to be kept waiting,' said Damanaka, and, making sure the bull was following him, ran to the banyan tree where Pingalaka still sat with his retinue.

Sanjivaka greeted Pingalaka with reverence, and Pingalaka, no longer afraid, politely asked after Sanjivaka's well-being. 'How did you come to this forest?' he asked.

Sanjivaka, reassured by the lion's courteous tones, told Pingalaka his story—of how he had set out with his master, how he had fallen into the patch of mud whilst pulling the heavy cart and how he had been left behind to die by his master's servants.

Pingalaka was deeply moved by the bull's sad tale. 'Friend, do not be afraid any more,' he said. 'From now on, you are under my protection. Stay here in this forest in peace. But be careful that you do not stray too far from my side, because then I may not be able to keep you safe. This forest is a dangerous place even for fierce animals such

as the bear and the wolf. You are a meek and mild creature who lives only on grass and knows not how to hunt—for you this forest could be very dangerous indeed.'

With the matter of the strange bellowing now resolved, Pingalaka gathered his followers together and went down to the river for a drink. And, having drunk his fill of the cool, sweet water, Pingalaka returned to the forest with his retinue and his new friend, the bull.

From that day on, Pingalaka relinquished all his kingly cares. Handing over the running of his kingdom to Damanaka and Karataka, he now spent all his time with Sanjivaka, who quickly became his dearest friend. Sanjivaka, who was very learned, had a greatly civilizing influence upon Pingalaka, so much so that the lion forgot his wild and fierce ways and gave up hunting and killing. He now preferred to sit quietly with Sanjivaka, listening to his wise and serene words. No other animal was allowed to disturb the lion and the bull when they were together, not even the two jackals.

But Pingalaka's deepening friendship with Sanjivaka and his change from a bloodthirsty hunter to a peace-loving creature became a great problem for the other animals. Most of his retinue depended upon the lion's kills for food, and now that he had stopped hunting, his followers had nothing to eat! Slowly, they began drifting away. For it has been said that

If a king does not provide for his followers,
They will leave him and go away.
A tree may be tall and mighty,
Yet if its fruit falls and its leaves wither,
Birds leave it and fly away.

Damanaka and Karataka, too, lived upon the meat they scavenged from the lion's kills. Neglected by the king, and starving, the two jackals put their heads together and began talking.

'Friend Karataka,' said Damanaka, 'we are no longer important to the king. Pingalaka's only concern these days is his friendship with Sanjivaka. He has forgotten his royal responsibilities and his followers have deserted him. In such a state, friend Karataka, what is our duty towards our king?'

'Friend Damanaka,' said Karataka, 'even if the king no longer listens to you, it is still your duty as his minister to tell him what is right and what is wrong. When a king does wrong, he is not criticized as much as his advisors are. By bringing this grass-eating creature, this bull,

into the king's life, you have brought trouble into our lives.'

'Friend Karataka,' said Damanaka, 'you are right. This situation is my fault, not the king's, because

The jackal was caught in the battle of the rams
The hermit was ruined by Ashadhbhuti,
It was nobody's fault but their own.'

'Why? What happened?' asked Karataka.

So Damanaka related the story of the jackal, the hermit and Ashadhbhuti.

The Story of the Jackal, the Hermit and Ashadhbhuti

Devasharma was a hermit. He had given up all the comforts of this world and retired to live all alone in a small, bare hut in the forest. He wanted nothing more to do with the world, and spent all his time in prayer and meditation.

As the years passed, people began to look upon him as a holy man. They would come from far and wide to seek his blessings, and bring him expensive and costly gifts. Someone would bring a shawl of fine silk, another a coat of gold brocade, a third would come laden with diamonds and precious jewels . . . Devasharma would graciously accept the gifts, but since he had no real use for them, he would sell them to the first merchant who came along. In this way, over the years, he built up a tidy store of money.

Unfortunately, this meant that he was no longer free of worldly cares. The very worries he had left the world to avoid had now followed him to his solitary hut. Now that he was a rich man, he fretted constantly about his hoard. He trusted no one, and dared not let the money out of his sight in case it was stolen. He became so afraid that he began to carry the gold tied up in a little bundle around his waist.

One day a thief called Ashadhbhuti came by and noticed the bundle of gold coins around the hermit's waist. 'Now, what does an ascetic like him want with gold?' he thought. 'It would be much more useful to a poor man like me!' The wicked thief began to scheme and plan. 'The walls of his hut are made of stone, so I can't dig through them, and the door is too strong for me to break down. So I must find another way to get to the treasure,' he said to himself. After scratching his head for a while, he came up with a clever scheme. 'I will beg the hermit to take me as his disciple, and once I have won his confidence, I will steal his money and run away!'

And so one morning, as the hermit sat in meditation outside his hut, Ashadhbhuti went up to him and threw himself at his feet. 'O holy one, I greet thee in Lord Shiva's name! This world is meaningless and

human life burns out as quickly as a fire lit with twigs! Friendship, love, beauty, wealth—all these are nothing but illusion. Tell me, O holy one, what must I do to cross this ocean that we call life and reach its other shore?'

Devasharma opened his eyes. 'You are wise beyond your years, my son!' he cried. 'With old age comes peace and wisdom, but that is the natural result of age. You are still young and strong—to show such understanding at your age is quite remarkable! But if you ask me what you must do to cross this sea of life, I would say, chant Lord Shiva's name and offer flowers at his temple, and you will find salvation.'

But Ashadhbhuti clutched the hermit's feet and cried, 'There is no one wiser than you, and I want nothing more than to be your disciple and serve you all my life. Do not deny me this, O holy one!'

Devasharma was flattered but hesitant—after all, there was his gold to protect and really, how could he trust this young man? But Ashadhbhuti begged and begged till he could no longer refuse. 'All right then, I will take you as my disciple,' he said. 'But on one condition: that you do not enter my hut after dark. You will sleep outside by the door, for it is good for your soul and mine to practise solitude.'

Ashadhbhuti agreed with alacrity, and from then on began to serve the hermit with great devotion. Soon, he had won the old man's trust and affection.

'It won't be long now, I'll find a chance to grab the old fool's money,' Ashadhbhuti would tell himself each day. But Devasharma was very careful, and never let the gold out of his sight.

One day, Devasharma was invited to perform a puja a little distance away. 'Make ready for the journey and let us leave at once for we have far to go,' he said to his disciple. When Ashadhbhuti had gathered together all the bits and pieces needed for the puja, they set off. The hermit walked ahead with his treasure tied securely around his waist; the thief followed, as a dutiful disciple should.

They walked and walked till they came to a wide river. It was a hot day and Devasharma decided to take a dip to cool down and cleanse himself before the puja. But he had a problem: he didn't want to get into the water with his treasure—what if the current swept it away?—and he didn't want to leave it unattended on the riverbank—what if someone came by and stole it? He thought and thought and then came up with a clever plan. Taking off his robe, he hid the treasure in its folds and placed it upon the riverbank. 'There,' he thought to himself, 'no one can tell that there is gold wrapped up in my tattered old robe!'

Very pleased with himself, he called to his faithful disciple who was still some way behind. ‘I am off for a purifying dip in the river, Ashadhbhuti, and then I must answer the call of nature in those bushes there,’ he said. ‘Look after my clothes, will you? They are old and worn, but they are precious to me.’

Ashadhbhuti promised to look after his master’s old robe with care, and Devasharma, convinced that his disciple had no inkling of the money hidden within its folds, went off for his dip in the river.

The greedy thief could not believe his luck. ‘The old fool has actually given his treasure to me!’ he cried. ‘Not that I haven’t worked for it, praying and fasting and living right for so many weeks! Now no more penance and pretence for me! A thief I am, and a thief I will be!’ And tucking the bundle of coins into his belt, off he ran as far away and as fast as he could.

Meanwhile, Devasharma took a leisurely swim in the cool, clear river, and then made his way into the bushes. As he squatted in the undergrowth, he could see a field beyond the trees. In the field was a herd of sheep, and amongst that herd were two enormous rams with curling horns and curling fleece. The rams were battling each other furiously—heads lowered, they would run at each other and lock horns, break away and do the same again. Both the rams had been hurt, and blood dripped from their wounds upon the ground.

A hungry jackal stood watching the battle, and as the rams would break away from each other, he would nip in for a quick lick at the blood spattered upon the grass; as the rams came charging back again, he would hop nimbly out of their way.

Devasharma watched the greedy jackal rush in and out between the rams. ‘If that creature is not careful, he will be caught between those horns!’ he said to himself.

And sure enough, that is exactly what happened. The jackal lingered a second too long for an extra lick, and crash! He was crushed to death between the warring rams.

The hermit watched, aghast. ‘Hai! What a way to die, and all because of his own foolish doing!’ he thought. Shaking his head, he made his way back to where he had left his clothes—to find no sign of either his bundle of coins or his ‘disciple’!

‘I’ve been robbed!’ he cried, and as the full realization of what had happened hit him, he fell to the ground in a faint.

Coming to after a while, he wept and moaned and called upon all the gods, one by one, for help. But it was no use—Ashadhbhuti had vanished, and taken his treasure too.

‘Ashadhbhuti, you scoundrel! I will find you and get my treasure back, if it’s the last thing I do!’ swore the hermit in a rage. Wrapping his robe about him, he began to follow the thief’s footprints in the dust. All day long he walked, through forests and fields, but he saw no sign of him. At last, footsore and weary, Devasharma turned back towards home.

‘It’s my own fault,’ he sighed. ‘I fell for that scoundrel’s flattery and believed his false wisdom. I have got what I deserved! If I had not been so foolish, I would not have been in this mess right now! And then, it was wrong of me in the first place to hoard all that gold! I should leave such greed to the merchants whose job it is to deal in money. Truly, I brought all this upon myself. I am no better than the foolish jackal who, because of his greed, was crushed to death by those rams!’

Devasharma returned sadly to his little hut, where he lived out the rest of his days in quiet solitude.

‘And so I say,’ concluded Damanaka, ‘that sometimes we suffer through our own fault—as did the jackal and the hermit, and as we are now.’

‘But now that we are in this situation, what should we do?’ asked Karataka.

‘There is only one way out of this situation,’ declared Damanaka. ‘We need to break up the friendship between our king and the bull and separate them from each other!’

‘And how would you do that?’ asked Karataka, alarmed. ‘Sanjivaka is very clever, and Pingalaka is very quick to anger. They are also strong and powerful, while you are puny and weak. If either of them becomes aware of your plotting, they will kill you.’

‘Do not say such things, friend Karataka,’ said Damanaka. ‘They will not find out. This is where my intelligence and shrewd thinking comes into play. For it is well known that

Even the weakest can get what they want
By cleverly scheming and planning ahead
When you lack force and power
Then use deceit and deception
Like the crow that got rid of the cobra.’

‘Oh! And how did it do that?’ asked Karataka, curious.

So Damanaka related the story of the crow and the cobra.

The Story of the Crow and the Cobra

In the spreading branches of a large, old banyan, there lived a pair of crows. Every year, they would build a comfortable nest in the old tree, and the female crow would lay in it three beautiful, speckled, blue–green eggs. The crows would take turns keeping the eggs warm, but, as soon as the eggs would hatch, an evil black cobra that lived under the tree would slither up and gobble up the chicks. This happened year after year, and no matter what the crows did, no matter how much they croaked and pecked and flapped their wings, they could not stop the cruel snake from eating their chicks.

At last, the female crow could bear it no longer. 'Let us leave this tree and fly away where this evil snake cannot follow us,' she begged her husband. 'Every year he eats up our children. My heart is breaking with sorrow, and I cannot live here any more!'

'But my dearest wife,' protested her husband, 'this tree is our home! We have lived here for so many years! How can we leave it and fly away? Besides, I will not be chased away from my own home by a serpent! Do not fear, I will find a way to stop him.'

'You are only a bird,' cried his wife, 'while he is an evil and deadly snake! His fangs are sharp and poisonous! How will you stop him?'

'Let us go and see our friend, the jackal,' replied the husband. 'He is a very clever animal, and I am sure he will be able to devise a plan to get rid of this cobra.'

The wife agreed, and together the crows flew off to see the jackal who lived in the hollow of another tree close by.

'Friend, tell us what we should do,' said the crows. 'Each year the black cobra eats up our chicks. Nothing that we do stops him. Can you tell us how we may get rid of him?'

'Hmm,' said the jackal with a frown. 'He is a strong and powerful enemy. We cannot kill him with brute force or bravery. What we need instead is a careful and cunning plan. For I am sure you must know that

Even after eating so many fishes,
That to count them was absurd,

The greedy heron was killed by the crab
Who saw what was coming and throttled the bird.'

'No! How did that happen?' asked the crows.

So the jackal related the story of the heron and the crab.

The Story of the Heron and the Crab

By a deep forest pond, there lived an aged heron. He was so old that his eyesight had dimmed and he could no longer move as fast as he once used to, with the result that he could no longer catch the fishes and other little creatures that lived in the pond. ‘At this rate, I will starve to death!’ he said to himself.

After some thought, he came up with a clever plan. He waded into the reeds and rushes that grew by the edge of the pond, and stood there sighing deeply, not bothering to catch even the fishes that swam up close to him.

A crab noticed this strange behaviour and sidled up to him. ‘Hey, Uncle Heron, why are you so sad? You haven’t even tried to catch a single fish all day! Is everything all right?’

‘Oh, my son,’ replied the heron, wiping away a tear, ‘my heart is not in hunting or catching fish any more. I sit here now, waiting for death.’

‘Why, Uncle? What is wrong?’ cried the crab, alarmed. ‘Has something dreadful happened?’

The heron shook his head. ‘No, my son, not yet, not yet . . . But something dreadful is about to happen—and soon.’ The heron wiped away another tear and continued mournfully, ‘The astrologers have read the stars and say that for twelve long years, there will be no rain. This pond—that you and I love so much—will dry up and disappear. And all my friends—you, and the little fishes that swim so merrily about—will die! And so I sigh and weep.’

The crab scuttled off and told all the other little creatures in the pond what the heron had said. ‘We’re going to die! What shall we do?’ they cried in panic, and, rushing to the heron, begged him to save them.

‘What gullible idiots! My plan is working perfectly!’ thought the heron with satisfaction. Pretending to wipe another tear, he said, ‘Not far from here, there is a lake. It is deeper and bigger than our little pond. Lotuses and lilies float upon it, and it will survive any drought. If you want, I can carry you there, one by one, upon my back.’

The little creatures believed the heron, and rushed to clamber upon

his back.

'Me! Me! Take me there first, Uncle!' they cried, and fought with each other to go first.

The heron was delighted at the smooth success of his little scheme. 'One by one, one by one!' he said, and the fishes, frogs and turtles all queued up, excitedly awaiting their turn.

The wicked heron would take the eager animals, one at a time, upon his back and soar up into the sky. Once out of sight of the others, he would alight on a large and lonely rock, and there make a leisurely meal of his passenger. In this way, the heron ensured a steady supply of food for himself. He no longer had to hunt or fish or make any effort at all as the water creatures kept lining up every day to be taken to the wonderful lake.

Only the crab was unhappy. 'Uncle,' he said at last, 'why have you left me out? You have flown so many fishes out, but I am still stuck here, in this tiny pond, waiting for drought and death! Please take me to our new home!'

'I have eaten enough fish for a while, and some crab may be pleasant for a change,' thought the heron to himself. He turned to the crab with a gentle smile. 'My son, I have not forgotten you,' he said. 'Today was the day I had set aside for you. So come, climb on to my back and let's go!'

The crab hopped on to the heron's back, and up, up into the sky the heron flew. The crab looked down upon the world with interest—how different it looked from up here! Excited and happy to be on his way at last, he kept a sharp lookout for the lake. The heron flew and flew, and soon they had left the forest behind. But no beautiful lake covered with lotuses appeared. Instead, the crab saw, glimmering in the distance, a high white mountain. As they flew closer to the mountain, the crab realized with horror that what he had taken to be a mountain was actually a pile of bones upon a large flat rock! The crab understood at once what the heron had been up to all these days. 'He is not our dear Uncle Heron! He is a murdering rascal, and those are the bones of all my friends that he has eaten!' the crab thought. But he did not panic; instead, thinking hard, he came up with a plan. 'Uncle,' he said in his sweetest voice, 'how far is this lake of yours? You must be tired—shall we stop and rest for a while?'

'You stupid crab, there is no lake,' said the heron with a sneer. 'I will smash you upon that rock and eat you, just as I have eaten all your friends!'

But the crab, his suspicions confirmed, was ready. Just as the heron

was about to kill him, he grabbed the heron's slender neck with his claws, and hung on as firmly as he could. The heron tried to shake him off, but the crab would not let go, till at last, the heron choked to death. Dragging the heron's head with him, the crab found his way back to the pond where the other water creatures still waited anxiously for the heron to return and fly them to safety.

'Why are you back? And where is Uncle Heron?' they cried as soon as they saw the crab.

The crab laughed. 'He was no uncle of ours; he was just an old scoundrel! There is no lake, just a large rock covered with the bones of our friends!' And he told the other animals how the heron had deceived them. 'But we are safe from him now, for the evil bird is dead,' he declared, and held up the heron's head for all to see. 'There will be no drought and no dying and we can all live in our pond happily for ever and after!'

'So you see,' said the jackal, concluding his tale, 'even if the enemy seems invincible, he can be defeated, and thinking calmly and planning carefully can achieve results where direct attack or assault cannot.'

'Friend, you have spoken wisely,' said the crows. 'So help us now, give us a plan to get rid of the snake.'

The jackal thought for a moment and replied, 'Dear crows, fly to the capital city of this land. There, in their large mansions and lush gardens, live the powerful and wealthy. Go to the house of one of these rich men—he could be a merchant, or even one of the king's ministers—and look around. Maybe someone has been careless and left a piece of jewellery lying about. Pick it up, and making sure that someone sees you, fly off with it. The rich man will send his servants after you. Lead them to your banyan tree and drop the piece of jewellery in the hole where your enemy lives. The rich man's servants will dig into the snake's hole to get the jewel back. They will see the snake and will, for certain, kill him. Do as I say, and you will be rid of your enemy.'

The crows thanked the jackal and flew off at once to carry out the jackal's plan. As they flew towards the city, the female crow noticed a large lake, and bathing in it a crowd of young women. These women were none other than the queen and her handmaidens, who had decided to come down for a swim in the lake. They had left their clothes and jewels in a pile by the shore. Upon that pile, the female crow saw a necklace of gold, glinting brightly in the sun. Immediately,

she swooped down and picked up the necklace in her beak and flew off with it—making sure that the queen's attendants had seen her.

The servants raised a loud cry, and several of them set off in pursuit of the crow. She flew steadily towards her nest, making sure that her pursuers did not lose sight of her. Reaching her nest, she let the necklace fall just by the mouth of the hole in which the cobra lived.

The servants ran up, huffing and puffing, and very angry. They saw the necklace lying on the ground, and beside it reared the cobra, its hood spread and hissing wickedly. The queen's servants were not afraid and beat the snake to a pulp with their stout sticks. Soon, the snake lay dead. The queen's servants picked up the chain and returned to the palace, and the crows, now rid of their fearful enemy, lived happily ever after.

'And so I say,' concluded Damanaka, 'careful planning can achieve what cannot be achieved by action alone. What's more, it is said that

One who has brains has strength
One without intelligence is powerless
The mighty lion in the forest
Was killed by a weakling rabbit.'

'Oh! And how did that happen?' asked Karataka.

So Damanaka told him the story of the lion and the rabbit.

The Story of the Lion and the Rabbit

Once, in a forest, there lived a fierce and cruel lion called Bhasuraka. Each day he would hunt and kill dozens of animals—deer, buffalo, boar and even smaller creatures such as rabbits and squirrels. While everyone knows that lions must kill for food, Bhasuraka killed many more creatures than he could eat. For him, killing had become a pleasure.

The other animals were terrified of him. 'No one is safe in this forest! We must find a way to stop him,' they cried. In despair, the frightened animals went to the lion and begged him to stop the slaughter. 'You are our king, sire,' they said. 'A king who looks after his people receives from them everything he wants. Barren land, if ploughed, yields a good harvest, saplings watered lovingly grow into tall trees, and dry twigs patiently rubbed together give fire. Look after us, O king, and we will fulfil your every wish. Do not kill our innocent children. Be like the wick in the lamp, sire, which gently draws up the oil without destroying the bowl that holds it. Take from us, O king, but do so gently, without cruelty.'

'So what would you like me to do?' growled Bhasuraka irritably.

The animals gathered up their courage and replied, 'Sire, we only ask that you stop your wanton killing. In return, we will send you one animal each day from amongst ourselves to eat. You will get food without having to hunt, and we will once again be able to walk around in the forest without fearing for our lives every moment.'

'Hmm, maybe they are right and I will appear more kingly if I am gracious,' thought Bhasuraka. 'All right,' he growled. 'I accept your offer. But do not try to trick me! If even one day passes without an animal coming to me, I will kill each and every one of you.'

The animals trembled at the lion's dreadful warning and ran back quickly into the forest. From that day on, they began sending one animal every morning to the lion. The lion, too, kept his promise, killing and eating only that one animal each day. There was peace in the forest once more.

Now, the day came when it was the rabbit's turn to go to the lion. He did not want to go—after all, who wants to be eaten? But he knew

he had no choice, because if he didn't go, the lion would kill all the animals in the forest. The rabbit set off slowly and unhappily for the lion's den. 'This is not right,' he said to himself. 'The lion still terrorizes us, even though he has stopped his senseless killing!'

As the rabbit hopped slowly along, he came to an old well. Curious, and in no hurry at all to reach the lion, he hopped up on to the brick wall bounding the well and peered in. The well was full of clean, fresh water, and peering back at him was a perfect reflection of himself. 'Aha!' cried the rabbit. 'I know how to get rid of that cruel lion!' And dawdling no more, he hurried as fast as he could to the lion's lair.

Bhasuraka had been waiting impatiently all morning. He was hungry and in a bad temper. 'If someone does not show up soon, I will kill all those lying animals!' he declared to himself.

Just then he saw the rabbit hurrying towards him. 'You are late!' he roared. 'And what's worse, you are too small to satisfy my hunger! I will eat you, and then I will kill all the animals in the forest!'

'Sire, do not be angry,' said the rabbit, humbly. 'Today it was my turn to come to you, but because I am so small, the animals decided to send four other rabbits with me. We were hurrying here when suddenly another lion caught us. We pleaded with him to let us go, and told him that our king, Bhasuraka, was waiting for us. But he only laughed scornfully. "Bhasuraka? That old fraud? He is not your king; I am!" he said. When I argued with him, he sent me here with a message for you. The other rabbits are his prisoners still.'

'And what is his message?' growled Bhasuraka, who was now even angrier than before.

'He has challenged you to a trial of strength,' said the rabbit.

Bhasuraka grew livid with rage. 'How dare he challenge me?' he roared. 'Take me to this scoundrel at once! I will show him who the real king is!'

'You are right to fight him, sire, and he deserves no better,' cautioned the rabbit. 'But he is a sly and cunning fellow for he has built a fort within which he sits in safety. It may not be so easy to defeat him.'

'Do you think a few walls will stop me?' growled Bhasuraka.

'No, sire, of course not, but please do be careful,' begged the rabbit, pretending to be nervous and scared.

'Enough of your timidity,' roared Bhasuraka. 'You are no judge of valour! Lead me to his lair and watch me destroy him!'

'Yes, sire,' said the rabbit humbly, and set off back to the well.

As they approached the well, the rabbit stopped. 'It seems the lion

has retreated into his fort, sire,' he said, pointing at the well.

Bhasuraka ran up to the well and peered into its dark depths. And what did he see? A large and ferocious lion glaring back at him! He roared in fury, and the lion in the well roared back at him. 'I will teach you a lesson you will never forget!' growled Bhasuraka ferociously. But the lion in the well was not afraid and growled right back at him! Bhasuraka did not wait any longer. With a roar that shook the forest, he lunged at the lion in the well—only to fall into the well with a great splash.

That, of course, was the end of Bhasuraka the lion. The rabbit hopped back to the forest with the good news, and from that day onwards, the animals lived in peace and without fear.

'And that is why I say,' concluded Damanaka, 'that intelligence is greater than brute strength. So friend Karataka, let me go to Pingalaka and Sanjivaka. I will cleverly cause dissension between them and end their friendship.'

'Very well, friend Damanaka, then go,' replied Karataka, 'and may you be successful.'

Damanaka said a hurried farewell to his friend and ran off into the forest. He soon found Pingalaka sitting in a small clearing. For once, the lion was on his own without Sanjivaka. Damanaka walked up to him and after greeting him respectfully, sat down in silence before him.

'What news, my friend?' asked Pingalaka kindly. 'I haven't seen you for many days!'

'O king, you do not need us now,' replied Damanaka dolefully. 'That is why I do not come to see you any more. Even now, I have come only to warn you. I cannot stay silent when you are in danger. So though you may not like to hear what I have to say, say it I must.'

'What do you mean? Speak clearly!' ordered Pingalaka brusquely.

'Sire,' answered Damanaka, 'Sanjivaka is planning to take your crown. I know because he told me so himself! Taking me aside he said to me, "Damanaka, I now have a good measure of Pingalaka! He is not in the least bit frightening, and as for strong—ha! I can easily beat him in a fight. I will kill him and become king."'

Damanaka's words struck Pingalaka with all the force of a thunderbolt, and he fell to the ground in a faint.

'Hmmm. It seems that Pingalaka does love Sanjivaka very much,' thought Damanaka as he stood beside his unconscious king. 'Now, in such a situation, what must I do?'

As Damanaka stood there pondering, Pingalaka regained consciousness. Sitting up, the lion said, ‘Sanjivaka is my best friend. He is as dear to me as life itself. Can he really be plotting to kill me?’

‘Sire, it is not true that a friend will always remain a friend,’ replied Damanaka. ‘All those who serve under a king wish to be king themselves. It is only their own incompetence that keeps them where they are, not lack of ambition or desire.’

‘No matter what you say, I look upon Sanjivaka as my friend and I cannot feel anything but love and affection towards him,’ declared Pingalaka.

‘It is precisely because of such trust that plots against the crown are successful,’ cried Damanaka. Pretending to be deeply disturbed, he continued, ‘Besides, what special quality do you see in this big, clumsy clod of a creature? Do you favour him so much because you hope to use his strength against your enemies? If so, know that he cannot be of any help to you. The bull is only a poor grass-eating thing, while your enemies are predators and hunters, meat-eaters all, strong and fierce. He cannot fight them. I say we accuse him of being a traitor and kill him.’

‘No,’ Pingalaka shook his massive head. ‘I have praised him in front of all the animals and granted him safe conduct in this forest. Besides, I cannot feel any anger towards him, even if he is plotting against me. So how can I kill him?’

‘Sire,’ said Damanaka, ‘do not push away good advice, for it is well known that

I paid no heed to what they said
The tiger, the monkey and the snake
And so I found myself in a mess
Tricked and betrayed by the man.’

‘Oh, and how was that?’ asked Pingalaka.

So Damanaka told him the story of the tiger, the monkey, the snake and the man.

The Story of the Tiger, the Monkey, the Snake and the Man

In a town far away, there lived a man called Yagyadatta with his wife and children. They were very poor, and every day Yagyadatta's wife would complain and grumble and beg him to earn more money. 'The children are hungry, there is no food in the house . . . go, find some work, do something, anything, just earn some money before our children starve!' she would say.

Finally, tired of his wife's nagging, Yagyadatta decided to go away on a long journey. He walked and walked and soon came to a dense forest. He was tired and thirsty; so he began searching for water. At last, he found an old well, hidden amongst the trees and overgrown with weeds and long grass. He peered into the well in the hope of finding water, but the well was dry, and trapped in it were a tiger, a monkey, a snake and a man. The moment they saw Yagyadatta they all began begging and pleading for help.

The tiger was the loudest. 'Help me out of this well,' he roared, 'so that I may go back to my wife and cubs in the forest.'

'Why should I pull you out?' cried Yagyadatta. 'The whole world trembles with fear at your name. What if you kill me?'

'I give you my word that I will not kill you,' promised the tiger solemnly.

'Oh, very well then, I will help you,' said Yagyadatta, and untying his turban, he let it down into the well and pulled the tiger up.

Now the monkey and the snake began to beg and plead, and after they had promised not to harm him in any way, Yagyadatta pulled them out. The animals thanked him again and again.

'Look, that is where my home is, in a cave deep in those mountains,' said the tiger pointing towards some mountain peaks that rose over the trees. 'You must come and visit me one day and allow me to thank you properly for your kindness to me.'

'And my home is amongst those mountains too, in a tall tree that grows beside the waterfall,' said the monkey. 'You must visit me too, so I can repay your kindness.'

‘As for me, I am everywhere,’ said the snake. ‘If ever you are in trouble, think of me and I will come.’

As the three animals prepared to say goodbye, the man in the well called out. ‘Help me out too!’ he pleaded.

The animals looked at each other and speaking as one, said to Yagyadatta, ‘No, do not help him. He is a rogue and a scoundrel, and he will only make trouble for you. It is best that you leave him where he is.’ And then, taking their leave, they disappeared into the forest.

Yagyadatta stood thinking over their words, and all the while the man in the well kept calling for help. ‘Please, kind sir, help me out, don’t leave me to die here,’ he cried.

At last Yagyadatta, who was essentially a kind person, took pity on the poor man and pulled him out of the well.

‘I am a goldsmith, and I live in the big city beyond the mountains,’ said the man. ‘If ever you have gold that you need to be worked into jewellery, come to me and I will help you.’ And so saying, he too set off through the forest towards his home.

Yagyadatta wandered through the forest for a few days more, and then decided to return home. On his way back, he decided to visit the monkey. The monkey welcomed him warmly and offered him the sweetest, most delicious fruits in the forest to eat. When Yagyadatta had eaten as much as he could, and after they had chatted for a while like good friends do, Yagyadatta stood up to go. ‘I will now say goodbye, my friend,’ he said to the monkey. ‘As a last favour to me, could you show me the way to the tiger’s house?’

The monkey gave him directions, and very soon Yagyadatta reached the tiger’s lair. The tiger was overjoyed to see him and welcomed him with great affection into his home. Eager to repay Yagyadatta’s kindness, the tiger brought out a gold necklace and other pieces of jewellery from his lair and handed them to Yagyadatta. ‘Many months ago, a prince and his horse had come riding by here,’ explained the tiger. ‘I was hungry, so I killed and ate them. But I saved the prince’s jewels. And here they are for you. Take them, and may all your troubles come to an end.’

Yagyadatta accepted the tiger’s generous gift with joy. At last, here was a way to get some money for his wife and starving children. He bid the tiger goodbye and decided to visit the goldsmith he had rescued from the well. ‘He owes me a favour, so he will certainly help me sell these jewels,’ thought Yagyadatta.

Soon he reached the city where the goldsmith lived and found his way to his house. The goldsmith received him with great respect.

After Yagyadatta had rested and refreshed himself, the goldsmith said, ‘It is an honour that you have come to visit me. Tell me, what can I do for you?’

Yagyadatta pulled out the jewels that the tiger had given to him and said, ‘I found these jewels in the forest. Can you sell them for me so I can get some money and return home to my wife and children?’

The goldsmith took the jewels and examined them closely. ‘Why, these are the very same ornaments I had made for the prince a few months ago!’ he realized. He did not say a word to Yagyadatta, but asking him to wait where he was, he ran with the jewels to the king. ‘Sire,’ he cried. ‘Look what I have found! The prince’s jewels!’

Now this prince was the same prince the tiger had killed. No one knew what had become of him. His father, the king, had searched high and low for him, but no one had ever found any sign of him till now.

‘Where did you find these?’ cried the king.

‘Sire, a man came to me and said he had found them in the forest. I have kept him waiting in my house.’

‘I am sure he killed my son and stole his jewels!’ declared the king, and at once ordered his soldiers to fetch Yagyadatta and throw him into the dungeons. ‘Execute him at dawn tomorrow,’ ordered the king.

Poor Yagyadatta. He lay, bound hand and foot, on the cold stone floor, and wept. ‘Oh, if only I had listened to the advice of my friends, the tiger, the monkey and the snake,’ he wept. As soon as he thought of him, the snake appeared, as he had promised he would. ‘How can I help you, my friend?’ he asked.

‘I did not kill the prince. I am innocent,’ said Yagyadatta. ‘Please help me to get out of here.’

‘Very well,’ said the snake. ‘I will go to the royal palace and bite the king’s beloved queen. She will fall into a faint and seem as though she is about to die. Nothing and no one will be able to make her better—not the king’s doctors, not the cleverest physicians in the land. I will make sure of that. Only the touch of your hands will save her. And once you save the queen, they will have to let you go.’ And the snake slithered off to carry out his plan.

Soon a great hue and cry arose. ‘What is the matter?’ asked Yagyadatta of the prison guards.

‘The queen has been bitten by a snake and lies dying in the royal palace,’ they said. ‘No one has been able to help, and the king has declared a reward for anyone who can save his beloved wife.’

‘I can save her, for I know how to remove the poison from her

body,' said Yagyadatta.

The guards ran to the king with the news that the prisoner was claiming that he could save the queen. The king ordered that Yagyadatta be released and brought to the palace at once. Yagyadatta did as the snake had told him and laid his hands gently over the queen. At once the poison left her and she opened her eyes and sat up.

The king was overjoyed, and thanked Yagyadatta with all his heart. He asked him to be seated and then with great courtesy asked, 'Sir, the gold ornaments that you brought to the goldsmith belong to our missing son. Please tell us truthfully how you came by them.'

Yagyadatta then told the king and the queen the whole story. The king had the goldsmith thrown into prison, and gave Yagyadatta a handsome reward and made him his prime minister. Yagyadatta sent for his wife and children, and they lived happily ever after.

'And so,' concluded Damanaka, 'if he had listened to the tiger, the monkey and the snake in the first place, he would never have got into a pickle, and it was only by listening to the snake again that he got himself out of that mess. That is why I say, sire, do not disregard good advice.'

'But,' objected Pingalaka, not quite convinced, 'As you yourself just pointed out, Sanjivaka is only a weak, grass-eating animal. What harm can he do us that I should kill him?

'Sire, it is not wise to pardon someone who plots against the crown,' said Damanaka. 'Sanjivaka has made you forget your duties as a king. Your followers depend upon you. Your kills used to provide them with food. But now they go hungry because in Sanjivaka's company, you have given up hunting. Many of your followers have already left you, and soon the ones remaining will go away too. As long as you stay with Sanjivaka, you will not feel like hunting because the friends we have influence what we do.' Damanaka paused to draw breath. 'Besides,' he continued, 'what do you know about him? He came here out of nowhere, a stranger, whose faults are as unknown to us as his virtues. It is well known that

Do not offer refuge to a stranger
Whose faults are quite unknown;
The louse to the bedbug gave shelter
And died through his careless behaviour.'

'Oh! And how was that?' asked Pingalaka, curious.

So Damanaka told him the story of the louse and the bedbug.

The Story of the Louse and the Bedbug

In a certain country there lived a king who had the most beautiful palace, and in the palace, the most beautiful and tastefully decorated bedroom. White silken sheets covered the royal bed, and in the folds of the sheets lived a little white louse called Mandavisarpini. Every night, as the king lay asleep, she would creep out of her hiding place and feast on his blood. The king did not know she was there, for he never felt her bite, and the little insect was happy and content with her life.

One day, a bedbug called Agnimukha wandered into the royal bedroom and upon the king's royal bed. 'Where have you come from, Agnimukha?' cried the louse. 'Run away quickly before anyone sees you, for if the king's servants see you they will kill you at once!'

But Agnimukha was not afraid. 'Madam,' he said, 'do not be so rude and brusque. Instead, welcome me graciously as your honoured guest. Ask me how I am, and what news I have; say you haven't seen me for a while. Offer me a place to rest, some food and drink . . . that is how a guest is received!' He crawled all around the king's bed, admiring the soft silken sheets. 'I must say that you do well for yourself here, madam,' he said, settling himself comfortably into a silken fold. 'Though I have travelled far and wide, and sipped the blood of a hundred men, I must confess that I have never tasted the blood of a king.' Agnimukha sighed wistfully. 'Madam,' he continued, 'I am your guest and have come to you tired and hungry. Let me stay here tonight and sip the king's sweet blood.'

'But Agnimukha,' protested Mandavisarpini, 'your bite is sharp—it hurts first, and then it itches. My bite is gentle, so that the king is not even aware of it. Besides, I am patient and willing to wait till he has fallen asleep before I bite him. You are hasty and restless, and may not be prepared to wait. If the king feels even the gentlest nip, he will have us destroyed.'

But the bedbug was not to be swayed. He begged and begged till the louse gave in. 'Oh very well, you can stay,' she said, 'but you must do as I tell you: stay hidden deep beneath the sheets, and wait till the king has fallen asleep and I have drunk my fill. Only then may you

have your turn.'

Agnimukha promised to follow all her instructions faithfully.

As the two insects talked, the king came into the room. He was tired, and stretched himself upon the bed.

Agnimukha, who was as impatient as he was greedy, couldn't bear to wait till the king fell asleep. Forgetting his promise to the louse, he crawled up to the king and bit him.

The bedbug's bite was as sharp as a needle, and the king jumped up in pain. 'Ow!' he cried. 'There's something nasty in my bed!' And calling his attendants, he ordered them to strip the sheets off the bed, and find the creature that had bitten him. 'It could be a bedbug or a louse,' said the king. 'Find it and kill it, so that I may sleep in peace!'

The royal servants turned the bed inside out. Agnimukha, who was quick and nimble, scurried away and hid himself in a corner of the bed. But Mandavisarpini, who was slower, could not get away, and the servants found her and killed her.

And so the louse lost her life, all because she gave shelter to a stranger and trusted someone she did not know.

'And so I say,' concluded Damanaka, 'do not offer protection to a stranger. It has also been said that,

The one who gives a stranger all his friendship
While forsaking his own kind,
He, like the foolish Chandarava,
Meets an unhappy end.'

'Oh, what happened to him?' asked Pingalaka.

So Damanaka told him the story of the jackal who fell into a vat of indigo dye.

The Story of the Jackal Who Fell into a Vat of Indigo Dye

In a forest far away, there lived a jackal called Chandarava. One day, starving and hungry, and unable to find anything to eat in the forest, he decided to go into the city to look for food.

As he scrabbled amongst the rubbish heaps in search of scraps, a pack of dogs came by and, seeing the jackal, they stopped. They were not friendly dogs, but fierce and savage fighters who did not allow any strangers into their territory. 'Who are you? How dare you come into our town?' they growled. And howling in fury, they fell upon the poor jackal and began to bite and scratch him.

The terrified jackal somehow managed to get away. He ran through the streets faster than he had ever run, while the dogs ran after him, howling for his blood. Desperate, he ducked into the open doorway of a house and ran through into the courtyard.

The house belonged to a washerman, and in the courtyard stood a large vat full of indigo dye. Chandarava, of course, did not know that the vat was full of dye and jumped into it without a thought. Imagine his shock to find himself drowning in some awful liquid! Choking and gasping for breath, he clawed his way out of the vat and cautiously made his way back into the street, not realizing that he had been dyed indigo.

The dogs, lying in wait for their quarry, did not recognize him. Instead, they took one terrified look at the indigo creature and fled, yelping, down the street. They had never seen such a strange animal in all their lives! Chandarava stared after them, amazed. What could have bitten those mangy creatures? Why had they run away? Surely it couldn't be because of him?

Or could it? Chandarava looked down at himself—and jumped in surprise. What on earth had happened to him? His fur was a bright indigo, not his usual beautiful grey! He looked so ugly! Maybe that was why the dogs had run away. He was too ugly to even chase. Miserable and afraid, he ran back to the forest.

In the forest, the other animals too did not recognize him. They,

too, had never seen a creature with indigo fur. Terrified, they ran squealing for their lives. ‘Who is he? We have never seen a creature so strange! Maybe he is an evil spirit or maybe he is a monster! He will eat us all! Run, run, run!’ they cried.

Chandarava, astonished, realized that the animals were afraid of him. ‘This could work in my favour,’ he thought, grinning slyly to himself. Taking a deep breath, he called out, ‘O forest creatures, big and small! Do not be afraid! I will not harm you. The gods themselves have made me. They named me Kakud-druma, and sent me here to protect the earth. That is why I have come—to look after you. From now on, I am your king and you are my people.’

The other animals believed him. After all, they had never seen an indigo jackal before!

They gathered round and greeted him, ‘O king, we await your orders,’ they cried.

Chandarava, as King Kakud-druma, now proceeded to enjoy a life of ease. He assigned each animal specific tasks for his comfort, all except the jackals. The jackals were his own kind, and afraid that they might discover who he really was, he had them all sent away. ‘We want nothing to do with jackals,’ he declared and banished them from the forest.

Turning his face away from his own people, he now began to spend his time with the other animals. The lion and the tiger he put in charge of hunting. They would kill their prey and bring it to him, and he would distribute the food amongst the others. The animals vied with each other to please their strange new king, and the jackal was happy.

Life continued in this way for some time.

One night, as Chandarava in his new form of King Kakud-druma sat surrounded by his subjects, a howling, wailing, barking song was heard upon the breeze. It was the jackal pack, calling through the trees. Chandarava jumped up in joy. He had quite forgotten that he was supposed to be King Kakud-druma, and raising his snout to the moon, he howled in reply. The call of his own kind was hard to resist.

The other animals stared at him in shock. ‘He is just a jackal, with his fur dyed blue!’ they cried. ‘He is no king sent here by the gods! He is just a liar!’ they shouted.

‘Kill him!’ growled the lion and the tiger, and pouncing upon him, they tore him to shreds.

‘And so,’ concluded Damanaka, ‘do not forsake your old friends, or

you will meet a sad and painful death, as surely as did Chandarava the jackal.'

'But Damanaka, what proof do you have that Sanjivaka wants to kill me?' asked Pingalaka, unconvinced.

'Well, when I saw Sanjivaka this morning, he said to me, "I will kill Pingalaka at dawn tomorrow!" Those were his very words, sire. What greater proof do you need? You will see for yourself—tomorrow at dawn he will meet you, his eyes red with anger and his lips quivering. You may then decide for yourself whether he wants to kill you or not. I have done my duty towards you and warned you. I can do no more.' And so saying, Damanaka stood up and walked away, leaving Pingalaka worried and confused.

Damanaka then went in search of Sanjivaka. He saw him sitting alone, and running up to him, greeted him and then sat down quietly by his side. Sanjivaka greeted him warmly, 'Friend Damanaka! How are you? I haven't seen you for a while. Tell me, is there something I can do for you?'

'How can I be well?' replied Damanaka mournfully. 'I am only the king's servant, and my happiness, even my life, depends on the king's mood. As a royal servant, I cannot eat when I want to, or sleep when I want to. I am always at the king's beck and call. Yes, my life is comfortable, but what is the point of comforts, Sanjivaka, without freedom?'

'Speak clearly, what is it that you wish to say?' asked Sanjivaka, puzzled by these sudden complaints.

'Friend,' sighed Damanaka, pretending to be deeply troubled, 'I am the king's trusted minister, and it is not right that I should betray his confidence. But because I like you, and because I was the one who brought you here, I will tell you the king's secret: he plans to kill you. This morning when I saw him, he said to me, "Tomorrow at dawn I will kill Sanjivaka, and by doing that, I will once again provide meat and food for my followers." I protested, I pleaded, I begged him to spare you. I reminded him that you were his dearest friend, but Pingalaka would not listen to me. So then I came running here, to warn you of his plans. Now, do what you think is best.'

Damanaka's words struck Sanjivaka with the force of a thunderbolt, and he fell to the ground senseless. Recovering consciousness after a while, he said, 'The friendship that I gave to Pingalaka is the biggest mistake I ever made. Real friendship is possible only among equals, and the weak should never try to make friends with the strong. After all, cows prefer the company of other cows, horses that of other

horses, fools seek out other fools and wise men are happy only with others like themselves. I should never have hoped to be friends with Pingalaka—he is the king, and I am just an ordinary bull. A king can love no one, and friendship with an insincere friend can only lead to sorrow. See how the wild goose, who made friends with an owl, was killed by an arrow.'

'How did that happen?' asked Damanaka.

So Sanjivaka told him the story of the wild goose and the owl.

The Story of the Wild Goose and the Owl

Once, upon a large lake in a forest, lived a wild goose called Madarakta. He had lived on that lake for many years and was happy and content with his life.

One day, an owl came flying by and alighted on the branch of a tree overhanging the lake. The wild goose swam up to the owl and greeted him politely. 'What brings you here, friend, to this remote lake in the forest?' he asked the owl.

'I have come to meet you,' replied the owl. 'You are known far and wide for your wisdom, and I wanted to pay my respects.'

The goose, pleased and flattered by the owl's words, invited him to stay. 'Come, live here with me by the shores of this lake,' he said. 'Stay for as long as you like.' The owl accepted the invitation, and the two birds began to live together in harmony and friendship.

One day, the owl declared that he must leave. 'I have enjoyed my time here with you, friend, but now I must return home,' he said. 'If you love me truly and think of me as your friend, please come and visit me.' And bidding goodbye to the goose, off he flew to his nest.

Some time passed, and the goose began to miss the owl. 'I have lived all my life on this lake,' he reflected. 'Maybe it is time for me to see the world and visit my friend.' And the goose flew off in search of his friend. After searching for a while, and asking birds and animals for directions, he found the owl's home, a dark hole in the hollow trunk of an old tree.

'Hello, old friend! See, I have come to see you as you had said! Come on, come out of your hole, I have so much to tell you!' said the goose, happy and excited to have found his friend at last.

But the owl was not happy to see him at all. 'Look, I don't come out in the day,' he said rudely. 'If you want to talk to me, you will have to wait till it is dark.'

The goose was sad, but waited patiently for the sun to set. At last it was night, and the owl came out of his hole. But by then the goose was so tired with his long journey and having to wait for the owl all day that he fell fast asleep at the entrance to the owl's home. Leaving him asleep outside his nest, the owl flew off into the night in search of

food.

Now, close by the owl's old tree, a caravan of merchants had set up camp for the night. As dawn broke, the caravan's leader blew loudly on a conch-shell to wake up the others. The owl, startled, gave a loud screech and quickly flew into the safety of his hole in the tree trunk. He did not bother to wake the goose or warn him, and left him sleeping by the entrance to his home.

The merchants, hearing the owl's screech, were very disturbed. 'This will bring us bad luck on our journey,' they said. One of them was an expert archer, who could shoot by sound alone. Fitting an arrow to his bow, he aimed it in the direction of the screech and let fly. The arrow whizzed through the air and pierced the sleeping goose through his heart, killing him instantly.

And so the wild goose lost his life, all because he tried to be friends with someone who did not care.

'And that is why I say,' sighed Sanjivaka, 'that friendship with an insincere friend can only lead to sorrow. So also my friendship with the king.' He paced up and down sadly. 'I can never please Pingalaka,' he sighed. 'If he had been angry with me for a reason, I could have tried to set it right. But it seems he is angry with me for no reason at all, so what am I to do? It is very difficult to understand the moods and fancies of kings.' Sanjivaka fell silent, lost in unhappy thoughts. 'I know what must really have happened,' he said after a while. 'Someone must have poisoned Pingalaka's mind against me. Perhaps some animal was jealous of my friendship with him and turned him against me.'

'If that is so, then you can soon win him back,' said Damanaka. 'All you have to do is talk to him and tell him how much you love him.'

'No, that will not work,' said Sanjivaka sadly. 'Mean and petty people can always find a way to do away with a good and noble person, even if he is stronger than them– just as the jackal and the crow murdered the unsuspecting camel.'

'Oh! And how did they do that?' asked Damanaka.

So Sanjivaka told him the story of the camel, the jackal and the crow.

The Story of the Camel, the Jackal and the Crow

Once, in a certain jungle, there lived a lion called Madotkata. Amongst his retinue of animals were a crow and a jackal.

One day, as Madotkata and his followers were wandering through the forest, they saw a strange, gangly beast such as they had never seen before. It had a long, swinging neck, big, flat feet and a huge hump on its back. 'What animal is that?' asked the lion, mystified.

'It's a camel, sire,' said the crow, who was a very knowledgeable bird. 'He lives with men and he works for them. Kill him; he is your rightful prey.'

'I can't kill him,' said Madotkata. 'He is a guest in this forest. Go and make him welcome, tell him that he is under my protection, then bring him here to me.'

The crow, the jackal and the other animals did as their king commanded and brought the camel to him. 'Who are you? What are you doing in my forest?' asked the lion kindly.

'Sire, my name is Kathanaka,' replied the camel. 'I come from a village far away where I live with my master. I carry heavy loads for him. Sometimes, he yokes me to a cart loaded with all kinds of goods and we journey with other men and their camels to faraway lands to trade and barter. It was on one such journey that we entered your forest. I hurt my foot and could not walk, so my master left me behind. I have lost my way and do not know where to go.'

Madotkata was moved by the camel's sad tale. 'Friend, come and live with us in peace. Forget your master and your life of drudgery. This forest is now your home.'

The camel gratefully accepted the lion's invitation and made the forest his home. His days now passed in peace and contentment. He had no more heavy loads to pull, and spent his days grazing upon the sweet grass and delicious leaves that grew in the forest.

One day, Madotkata got into a fight with an angry elephant and was badly wounded by the elephant's sharp tusks. Though he survived his wounds, he could no longer hunt or kill. Soon, he and all the other animals who depended upon him for food began to starve. 'I cannot bear to see my people starve,' said Madotkata, and ordered his

followers to find and bring to him prey he could kill even in his wounded state.

After searching the forest in vain for an animal the wounded lion could kill, the jackal turned to the crow and said, 'Why do we tire ourselves with this futile search? Kathanaka the camel is right here—why don't we kill him?'

'You know how Madotkata feels about that,' replied the crow with a shrug. 'He has given his word that the camel will be safe here, and nothing is going to make him change his mind.'

'Ah, leave that to me!' said the jackal. 'I will use my powers of persuasion and make our master change his mind in a jiffy!'

The jackal ran back to the lion and said, 'Sire, we have looked everywhere but have found no animal that you could kill in your weakened state—except the camel, Kathanaka. He is so meek and gentle, you could kill him easily, and his flesh would satisfy us all.'

Madotkata was furious when he heard the jackal's words. 'How dare you insult me so?' he roared. 'I have given the camel my word, and I will not kill him. If you ever suggest such a thing again, it is you whom I will kill!'

'Sire, please hear me out,' said the jackal, undaunted. 'If you kill the camel of your own will, then yes, you will indeed be breaking your word. But should the camel freely offer you his life, then in accepting that you will be breaking no promise. In fact, you will be doing the camel a great honour by accepting his sacrifice.'

Madotkata, brave and noble though he was, gave in to hunger and allowed himself to be convinced by the jackal's sly words. 'Do what you think is best,' he said, turning away.

The wily jackal lost no time at all, and, running back to the crow, explained his plan to him in a whisper. Then, weeping and wailing and making sure that the camel could hear him, he cried loudly, 'Our king lies wounded and cannot hunt any more, he is slowly starving to death. Come, dear crow, let us give our lives to him so that he may live. That is the least we can do for our king.' The crow joined the jackal in his weeping, and the two went up to where sat the lion, Madotkata. The camel, curious, followed them.

'So, have you brought me prey to kill?' asked Madotkata.

'No, sire,' wept the crow. 'We searched everywhere and could not find any suitable animal. So please accept my body instead—kill me and satisfy your hunger.'

'Your body is too small,' said the jackal stepping forward. 'Eat me, instead, O sire.'

The camel, who was watching, was deeply impressed. ‘They are both such noble animals,’ he said to himself. ‘Maybe I should offer myself too, because then I will appear noble too. Besides, I don’t think the king will kill me, because even though these two have offered to die for him, he has killed neither of them.’ Thinking thus, the camel stepped forward and said, ‘Sire, do not kill either of them. Eat me instead. Accept my sacrifice and I shall go straight to heaven.’

The words were barely out of his mouth when the lion fell upon him and killed him. The hungry animals then feasted happily upon his flesh.

‘And so I say,’ concluded Sanjivaka, ‘that the small and petty-minded can always find a way to do away with those who are good and less devious.’ He looked sadly at Damanaka. ‘Friend,’ he continued, ‘your king’s advisers are also mean and petty-minded, not noble or honourable. Surrounded by such people, the king has fallen to their level and has begun thinking like them. A king with such advisers can never make his people happy. For it is said and truly so, that

A good man in the company of evil ones
becomes one of them
Just as a swan surrounded by geese
behaves like one of them.’

‘It seems to me that that is exactly what has happened to Pingalaka—influenced by those around him, he has turned against me. Tell me, Damanaka, what should I do?’

‘If I were you, my friend, I would go as far away from the king as I could,’ said Damanaka. ‘Perhaps that is what you should do—leave this forest, travel, see new places, explore strange lands. That way you will be safe from the king’s displeasure.’

‘Ah no,’ said Sanjivaka, shaking his head. ‘That would give me no peace or safety. A powerful enemy such as the king could find me and have me killed, no matter how far I travelled.’

Sanjivaka pawed the ground thoughtfully, then, taking a deep breath, said, ‘I am afraid, Damanaka, that in this situation, the only option left to me is to fight the king, one-to-one. It is better that I die fighting like a hero than run away like a coward.’

‘No, Sanjivaka, that is not a good idea at all!’ exclaimed Damanaka. He did not want the mighty bull to fight Pingalaka—suppose the creature gored the king with his long, sharp horns and killed him?

That would be a disaster! ‘Pingalaka is a very strong and powerful lion; it will not be wise to take him on,’ said Damanaka, pretending to be concerned for the bull’s safety. ‘Challenging someone whose strength you do not know will only result in humiliation for you. Have you not heard

How the sea was defeated and disgraced
By the tittibh bird
Whose strength it had not gauged?’

‘No, how did that happen?’ asked Sanjivaka.

So Damanaka told him the story of the tittibh bird and the sea.

The Story of the Tittibh Bird and the Sea

On the shores of a distant sea, there lived a pair of tittibh birds. One day, the female tittibh said to her mate, ‘Husband, I am ready to lay our eggs. Please find me a safe and sheltered spot where we can make our nest.’

‘Dearest, why not lay your eggs right here by the seashore?’ said the husband. ‘It is so lovely here with the gentle sea murmuring softly upon the golden sand.’

‘Oh no, husband!’ cried the wife, ‘don’t be deceived by this gentle sea! Don’t you remember? On full moon nights the waves are so high they touch the sky and so strong that they can drag an elephant out to sea! If we stay here, my eggs will be washed away!’

‘That’s nonsense, wife,’ said the male bird briskly. ‘I’ve never heard anything more absurd! The sea does not have the strength to destroy our nest! Besides, it would not dare to harm my children. Don’t be afraid of the sea, my dear, and lay your eggs here.’

The sea heard the bird, and marvelled at what he had heard. ‘How can this tiny bird be so arrogant? He thinks he is mightier than me! He needs to be taught his place, and just for that, I will steal his eggs away! Then we will see who is stronger, this boastful bird or I.’

Meanwhile, the tittibh birds built their nest by the shore, and in due course, the female laid her eggs. One day, both the birds were away in search of food. This was the chance the sea had been waiting for—it crept up to the nest, wave by stealthy wave, and stole the eggs away.

When the birds returned to their nest, they found their eggs had vanished. The female bird wept and wept, and nothing her husband could say or do made her stop. ‘You would not listen to my fears,’ she cried. ‘I warned you that the shore was dangerous, that the sea would take our eggs. But you were a fool, and would not listen to advice! Truly has it been said,

Those who pay no heed to good counsel
Are destroyed halfway to their goal
Like the foolish turtle who disregarded
The advice of his well-meaning friends.’

‘And how did that happen, my dearest wife?’ asked the male tittibh.

So his wife told him the story of the foolish turtle and swans.

The Story of the Foolish Turtle and the Swans

Once, in a little lake, there lived a turtle called Kambugriva. Her best friends were two wild swans called Sankata and Vikata. The three would meet every morning by the edge of the lake and talk of this and that. They loved to spend time in each other's company. No one had ever seen closer friends than these three creatures.

One year, no rain fell and the land was hit by a severe drought. The turtle's pond began to dry up, and the clear fresh water began turning to mud. 'You will die without water,' cried the swans, deeply worried about their friend.

Kambugriva was worried too, but she refused to give up hope. She was certain that there had to be a way out. 'I have an idea,' she said to the swans. 'First, fly out as far as you can, and find a lake that still has water. Then come back, and bring with you a stout stick. Grasp the ends of the stick between your beaks, while I hold on to the middle with my mouth, and, in this way, fly me out of this pond to the lake.'

'It's an ingenious plan,' said the swans, 'and we will do as you say. But remember, you must not talk or open your mouth even a little when we fly you through the air. Do you think you could manage that?'

The turtle was sure she could, and so the swans did as she had suggested. They found a lake full of fresh, clean water, and then, bringing a stick for the turtle to grab, off they flew with the two ends in their beaks. All went well for a while. The swans flew steadily through the air, and the turtle hung on to the stick with her mouth.

Soon, a town appeared below them. The townsfolk, seeing the strange sight in the sky, came running out of their homes and shops. 'Look, look, the swans are carrying a turtle!'

The turtle looked down at the ground and saw the crowd. 'What's all the noise about?' she asked. But of course, as soon as she opened her mouth she fell—down, down, down from the sky, and crashing to the ground, she died.

The townsfolk feasted on turtle meat that night.

'This is what happens to those who ignore good advice,' said the

tittibh bird to her husband. ‘And so, do not ignore my words any more. We’ve faced disaster once, let us not repeat the same mistake again. Now let’s look ahead and plan, for it is said, and rightly so that,

The one who anticipates disaster and plans ahead to save himself,
The one who spots it coming close and steps aside in time—
These are the ones who will survive to live long and happy lives.
But the one who trusts to fate and chance
And does not think to help himself
Such a one will be destroyed when calamity comes.’

‘Oh, and how will that be? Explain it to me, dear wife,’ said the male tittibh.

So his wife told him the story of the three fishes.

The Story of the Three Fishes

Once, there lived three fishes in a pond. They were called Anagatvidhata, meaning ‘far-sighted’, Pratyutpanmati, meaning ‘quick-thinking’, and Yadbhavishya, meaning ‘one who relies on luck’. The three fishes were true to their name, for Anagatvidhata always planned ahead, Pratyutpanmati was always resourceful and quick, and Yadbhavishya always depended on luck to get him out of trouble.

One evening, some fishermen passed by the pond on their way home. ‘Look, this pond is full of fish!’ they cried. ‘Today, the day is done and our nets are full. But tomorrow at sunrise we will come here to catch all the fish!’

When Anagatvidhata heard this, he called all the other fishes together and said, ‘You have heard for yourself what the fishermen said. We must leave this pond tonight, or we will all be dead tomorrow at dawn!’

Pratyutpanmati said, ‘Friend, you are right. You had always said that one day this would happen, and now that disaster is upon us, let us find another pond. Though this pond is our ancestral home, we must leave it behind. It is time to move away.’

But Yadbhavishya only laughed. ‘You can’t mean this seriously!’ he said. ‘Leave our wonderful, comfortable pond just because a few fishermen happened to pass by and said a few words? Yes, it is true we will all die—not tomorrow, not by being caught by these fishermen, but some day, of old age! We can’t just abandon our home like this! Who knows, the fishermen may never come! Besides, no matter how far we run, if we are fated to die, then die we will! So leave if you want to, my friends. But I—I will stay here!’

So Anagatvidhata and Pratyutpanmati gathered their families and friends together and left the pond that very night. But Yadbhavishya stayed behind.

Next morning, at sunrise, the fishermen came and cast their nets, and true to their word, caught every fish that was still in the pond. And so, Yadbhavishya and his family and friends all died in the fishermen’s nets.

‘And so, my husband,’ said the female tittibh bird, ‘it’s time to think ahead. Do not rely on luck; let’s move away from here instead.’

‘Beloved wife,’ said the husband, deeply hurt, ‘do you think I am as stupid as the fish in your story? Would I endanger our eggs and trust your happiness to chance? Wait and see—I will drink up the sea with my beak! I will create a desert where now the waves dance and sing. We shall see then who is foolish and who is weak!’

‘Why do you waste your energy on foolish words and empty threats?’ cried his wife. ‘The sea is deep and great and vast, and you are just a small bird. Do not fight with someone who is so much stronger than you. If you challenge the sea, you will die, just like a moth in a candle flame.’

‘My dearest love, that is just not true!’ protested the male tittibh. ‘I may be only a little bird, but I am brave. Courage, even in the small and weak, can defeat the strongest foe, just as the light from even a little lamp can dispel the greatest darkness.’

‘O foolish husband,’ cried his wife, ‘do you not know that eighteen hundred mighty rivers drain into this sea? What you propose cannot be done. Why do you persist with your senseless talk?’

‘Wife, my beak is strong, the day is long, and the night longer still! I will persevere, and I will drink up the sea.’

‘Husband, if you insist, then at least call upon the other birds to help you drink up the sea. For it is a well-known truth, husband, that,

Weak blades of grass twisted together, form rope strong and durable
The weak, when they work together, can become a force formidable—
Like the sparrow and her little friends,
Who killed the giant elephant.’

‘And how did they do that? Tell me the story, beloved wife,’ said the male tittibh.

So his wife told him the story of the sparrow and the elephant.

The Story of the Sparrow and the Elephant

In a certain forest, amongst the leafy branches of a tamal tree, a pair of sparrows built a nest in which the female sparrow laid her eggs.

One very hot day, an elephant came strolling through the forest, looking for a shady tree under which to shelter from the sun's heat. Seeing the leafy shade of the tamal tree, he decided to stop under it for a while. Bored and fidgety, he swung his trunk up into the tree, and grabbing hold of a branch, pulled it down. Unfortunately, this was the branch on which the sparrows had built their nest. Though the sparrows escaped, their nest tumbled to the ground and the eggs were smashed. The elephant, thoughtless and uncaring, ambled off through the trees.

The mother sparrow was distraught with grief. She fluttered here and she fluttered there, but there was nothing she could do about her eggs. Broken-hearted, she began to sob.

A woodpecker in a tree close by heard her crying, and flew over to see what was wrong. He tried to console her with quiet words. 'Dear sparrow,' he said, 'don't cry so. What's done is done. Those who have gone are gone. Tears do not help the living, nor do they bring back the dead. The wise do not mourn what cannot be mended.'

'Woodpecker, what you say is true,' said the sparrow. 'My tears will not bring back my eggs, I know. My tears are tears of anger against that uncaring, unfeeling rogue of an elephant. It is not fair that he should just walk away, after destroying my world like this. Woodpecker, if you really want me to smile again, help me kill that elephant!'

'If that will make you smile again, then, as your friend, that is what I will help you do,' said the woodpecker. 'But first, I will fetch my friend the fly. Her name is Vinarava, and she's a clever little thing. She will be of great help to us.'

So off flew the woodpecker to the fly. 'Vinarava, will you help my friend the sparrow?' he asked.

'You are my friend, and helping any friend of yours is the same as helping you—so of course I will help your friend the sparrow,' replied the fly. 'But wait, let us first fetch my other friend, Meghanada the

frog. He is very learned, and wily too. He can give us good advice.'

So off they went—the fly, the woodpecker and the sparrow—to find Meghanada the frog. He listened to their tale and said, 'Do not despair. When good friends put their heads together, no enemy stands a chance! That elephant is as good as dead already. Now, this is what we must do—in the afternoon, when the sun is at its peak, the elephant usually finds a shady tree under which to rest. At that moment, you, fly, must buzz gently in his ear till, soothed by your buzzing, he feels sleepy and closes his eyes. As soon as his eyes are shut, you, woodpecker must fly in and—one! two!—swiftly peck out his eyes. I will be standing by. The blinded elephant will cry out in pain and sooner or later he will need water. I will croak loudly. The elephant will assume that he is near water and I will, through my croaking, lead him to the edge of a deep pit into which he will fall. He will not be able to get out, and he will die in that pit.'

The friends did exactly as the frog said: the fly buzzed the elephant to sleep, the woodpecker pecked out his eyes and the frog lured the blinded elephant to the edge of a deep pit in the forest. The elephant fell into the pit and died.

'This is how the sparrow, with the help of her friends, killed the giant elephant,' the female tittibh bird ended her story. 'And so my husband,' she said, 'if you will persist in challenging the sea, then at least gather your friends and well-wishers together.'

'Hmm, now that sounds like good advice,' agreed her husband, and called all his friends together. The peacock, the crane, the duck, the stork and all the other birds of the world answered the tittibh bird's call for help. When all the birds were gathered together, he said, 'The sea has stolen our eggs! Think of a way, my friends, to avenge my loss.'

The birds put their heads together and discussed the problem with great passion. At last one little bird said, 'We can't drink up the sea, my friend, not even if we work together. It is too big and powerful. We need someone who can tell us what to do. So let us go and see the old goose who lives under the banyan tree, for it is said, and truly so, that,

The old are wise and in experience rich
Listen to the old goose for it is he who saved
The flock of wild geese from the bird catcher.'

‘Oh, and how did he do that?’ the other birds asked.

So the little bird told them the story of the wild geese and the bird catcher.

The Story of the Wild Geese and the Bird Catcher

In a large banyan tree in the forest, there lived a flock of wild geese. One day, a little creeper began to grow at the base of the tree. It sent out tiny, tender, little shoots that clasped the gnarled trunk of the old banyan. The old goose saw the creeper and said to the other birds, 'Look, a creeper is beginning to grow around our tree. Let us destroy it while it is still small and weak. Otherwise, it will become strong and sturdy and make it easy for a bird catcher to climb our tree.' But the other birds ignored his advice and did not destroy the little creeper.

The creeper grew and grew, and soon it had covered the entire trunk of the tree and reached into its branches.

One morning, while the wild geese were away looking for food, a bird catcher came by with his nets. 'Oho,' he said, seeing the creeper, 'this tree is easy to climb. Perhaps there are birds up there I can catch.' He climbed up with his nets and seeing the nests of the wild geese, he set his traps around them and left.

When the birds came back in the evening, they were caught, each and every one, in the bird catcher's snares. 'You ignored my advice, and now see what has happened,' said the old goose.

'Oh! Oh! Oh! What shall we do? What shall we do?' cried the birds in despair. 'Please tell us what to do, we promise that this time we will listen to your advice!'

'Very well, then, but you must do exactly as I say,' said the old goose. 'When the bird catcher returns in the morning, we must all close our eyes and lie as still as possible. He will think that we are dead and he will disentangle us from his nets and throw us down upon the ground. Wait till he has thrown down every one of us. As he begins to climb down the tree, we must rise all at the same time and fly away together. This is the only way to escape the bird catcher and his snares.'

The geese did exactly as the old goose had advised. When the bird catcher came the next day, he saw the birds lying so still that he was convinced they were dead. One by one he disentangled them and threw them upon the ground. As soon as the last bird had been thrown down, and the bird catcher began to climb down the tree, the

wild geese rose up as one and flew away together. The poor bird catcher was left scratching his head in bewilderment.

'And that is why I say, we should consult the old goose,' concluded the little bird. 'He is old and experienced and will have good advice for us.'

So off flew all the birds to the old goose who lived in the banyan tree. The old goose heard the sad tale of the tittibh birds and their eggs and said, 'You need someone strong and powerful to help you, and the strongest and most powerful of all the birds is our king, the eagle Garuda. You should go to him and, telling him your story, ask him to help you.'

So the little tittibh bird and his friends flew to Garuda's palace and told him their tale of woe. 'Help us, O Garuda,' they said. 'The sea must be punished. Today, he has stolen the tittibh eggs; if he remains unchecked, tomorrow he may destroy us all! You are our king—protect us from our enemy!'

Garuda was greatly angered to hear of the sea's behaviour. 'I will dry up its waters immediately,' he declared.

Now, Garuda was Lord Vishnu's steed, and whenever the great god wished to go somewhere, he would fly him there upon his back. Just as Garuda was about to set out on his mission against the sea, a messenger arrived from Lord Vishnu. 'Lord Vishnu has to leave urgently for the city Amaravati, and requests your presence immediately, ' said the messenger.

Garuda shook his great wings in anger. 'Ha, messenger!' he said, 'why does your Lord require my poor presence? I am not worthy of his attention. Tell him that I do not wish to work for him any more. He should find someone else to replace me!'

The messenger had never heard Garuda speak so rudely before. 'Sire, why do you speak so harshly?' he asked. 'What has Lord Vishnu done to offend you so? Please tell me, sire, so I can explain your anger to him.'

'Look here, messenger,' said Garuda, still angry, 'the sea is Lord Vishnu's subject—it is his abode and his resting place. Yet it has harmed my people. The sea has dared to steal the eggs of this little tittibh who is under my care! I cannot let this wrong remain unavenged. Nor can I let this insult to my honour pass. Tell your Lord Vishnu that I will not work for him any more.'

When Lord Vishnu heard Garuda's complaint, he nodded thoughtfully and said, 'I understand why he is so angry. He has a right

to sulk and be annoyed. He has served me faithfully and been my friend since time began. If I am to keep his love and friendship, I must be true to him as well.' Vishnu rose up and went at once to Garuda's palace.

Garuda, seeing Lord Vishnu there, bowed his head and said, 'Lord, the sea has stolen the tittibh eggs. He has harmed my people and insulted me. But he is your subject, and so, not wishing to offend you, I have stopped myself from punishing him.'

'Ah Garuda, it is the master who must bear the blame for his servant's actions. Since the sea is my subject, I must take responsibility for his crime. So come with me. Let us see if we cannot, together, convince the sea to return the tittibh eggs.'

Then Vishnu went with Garuda and all the other birds to the sea and said, 'Give back the tittibh eggs at once! Otherwise, I will turn you into the driest desert this minute!'

The sea knew that Lord Vishnu was all-powerful. Trembling with fear, it placed the tittibh eggs gently upon the beach and sank down in shame.

The delighted tittibh thanked Garuda and Vishnu, and took the eggs back to his wife. 'Did I not say I would defeat the sea?' he cried. 'See, here are your eggs, safe and sound. Now cry no more, my beloved wife.'

'And so,' concluded Damanaka, 'that is why I say do not take on an enemy whose true strength you do not know, or, like the sea, you too may have to face defeat and humiliation.'

Sanjivaka was still brooding over Damanaka's words that Pingalaka wanted to kill him. 'Friend Damanaka,' he said, 'how can I believe that Pingalaka really wants to kill me? All these days he has shown me only love and friendship. Not for a moment has he been angry or unhappy with me. So show me some clear and definite proof that he is angry with me. Once I have such proof and am truly convinced of his evil intentions towards me, I will take steps to protect myself and kill him.'

'Why do you need proof?' demanded Damanaka. 'Pingalaka's behaviour alone should convince you of how he feels towards you. If he frowns at you, and licks his lips while looking at you, you can be sure he plans to kill you. And if he doesn't look angry, well, then you know he isn't angry!' Damanaka stood up as though to take his leave. 'I must leave you now, my friend,' he said. 'Be careful that you do not tell anyone what I have just told you, for the king has spies

everywhere. Take my advice and leave this forest by sunset tonight, for that is the only way you can save yourself.' After giving Sanjivaka more such advice, Damanaka ran off to see his friend Karataka.

'Damanaka! What have you been up to?' asked Karataka, seeing him approach.

'I have been sowing the seeds of dissension and discord between Sanjivaka and Pingalaka. Now whatever will be will be, for the future is determined by fate,' replied Damanaka. 'Which does not mean that we leave everything totally to fate, of course,' he added after a pause. 'The clever man does all he can to make events turn his way. If, even then, the future does not work out the way he wants it to, well then, it is not his fault. I, with my clever lies, have made sure that Pingalaka and Sanjivaka will never again speak to each other as friends!'

'You have not done right, Damanaka,' said Karataka. 'It has been said that the one who brings sorrow into another's life will find only suffering and sadness in his own life. It is easy to break, but not easy to mend. The wind can uproot the strongest trees, but cannot plant again an uprooted one.'

'You do not know the ways of the world,' said Damanaka. 'Illness and an enemy must be stopped the moment they appear, or they will grow and become stronger, till they ultimately destroy you. Sanjivaka is our enemy, and I have done no wrong in trying to get rid of him. If a person is clever, he can escape all blame even if his actions have harmed others—just as Chaturaka the clever jackal escaped all blame even though he tricked his rivals to achieve his aim.'

'Oh, and how did he do that?' asked Karataka.

So Damanaka told him the story of Chaturaka the jackal, and how he tricked the wolf and the lion.

The Story of How the Jackal Tricked the Wolf and the Lion

Once, in a forest, there lived a mighty lion called Vajradanstra. He had two faithful followers—a wolf called Kravyamukha and a jackal called Chaturaka.

One day, a camel wandered into the forest by mistake. The camel was pregnant and about to give birth, and in the throes of labour, she had become separated from her herd. The lion saw the camel resting under a tree, and claiming her as his prey, attacked and killed her. It was only then that he saw the little newborn calf lying by her side.

The lion and his two attendants, the wolf and the jackal, feasted upon the dead camel, but the lion would not let them harm the baby. Instead, he took the little camel home with him, and said, 'Child, stay in this forest with me. Here, no one will harm you, for you are now under my protection.' And because the little camel had pointy ears he named him Shankukarna, or 'spike-ears'.

The little camel began to live with the lion, the wolf and the jackal. The four animals were firm friends, and spent their days playing with each other or telling each other stories to pass the time. In this way, several years went happily by. The little camel was now quite grown up, but even so, he would not leave the lion's side.

One day, Vajradanstra got into a fight with a wild elephant. The elephant was huge and strong, and gored the lion with his massive tusks. The lion, badly hurt, could barely walk, leave alone hunt. He called his faithful followers to him and said, 'Go find me an animal that I can kill even in my wounded state. We can share its meat amongst us all.'

The camel, the wolf and the jackal left to do the lion's bidding. But the jackal, who was a cunning and sly little creature, thought to himself, 'What if Vajradanstra was to kill Shankukarna? The camel's flesh would give us meat for days.' But first, he would have to convince the lion to kill a creature he regarded as his friend and special charge. Chaturaka sighed. This could be difficult. The lion would never kill the camel for food, unless . . . The wily jackal smiled

to himself. He had a plan!

'Shankukarna, my dearest friend,' he said to the camel, 'as you know our lord and master is dying. You, and only you, can save his life.'

'Oh, if only that is true!' cried the camel, who loved the lion dearly. 'Chaturaka, tell me how, at once! I will do anything to save his life!'

'Well, will you lend your body to the lion? Your flesh will give him life, and you, dear camel, will be born again twice as big and tall as you are now.'

'Chaturaka, if what you say is true, then the gain is all mine. I will save our beloved master, and get a body that is twice as big as the one I have now! Hurry, let us go to him and offer him my flesh to eat.'

The jackal and the wolf hurried with the camel to the lion and said, 'Sire, we did as you had said, but we could find no creature for you to kill. However, Shankukarna here has a generous offer—he is prepared to give you his flesh to feast on, if you guarantee that in return he will receive a body twice the size of his present one in his next life.'

'Indeed, I guarantee it,' said the lion.

Even before the words were fully out of his mouth, the wolf and jackal fell upon the camel and killed him.

When the camel lay dead before them, the lion said to the jackal, 'I must go down to the river and bathe before I eat. Stand guard over the camel's body, Chaturaka. Make sure no one touches it till I return.' And off went the lion to the river.

Chaturaka eyed the camel's corpse. 'This meat will last me for weeks,' he thought. 'Now how do I make sure that I get all of it?' He thought for a little while, then turned to the wolf. 'Oh Kravyamukha, my brother,' he cried, 'I cannot bear to see you hungry. The lion will take a long time to come back from the river. Why don't you take a few bites of the meat meanwhile? I will make up some story to tell him and make sure he doesn't blame you.'

The wolf believed the cunning jackal, and without further thought, began to feast upon the camel's flesh. He had barely taken two bites when the jackal cried, 'Kravyamukha, watch out! The lion is coming. Stop eating!'

The wolf stopped eating at once, and moved away from the carcass. The lion, returning, saw that the camel's ear had been eaten. 'Who has dared to touch this meat?' he roared. 'Tell me who it is, and I will kill him right now.'

The wolf looked at the jackal for help, but the jackal laughed scornfully and said, 'I told you not to touch the meat, Kravyamukha,

but you insisted that you wanted the heart for yourself! Now face our master's anger!'

The wolf realized that the jackal had betrayed him, and terrified, he turned tail and ran away as fast as he could. Chaturaka smiled to himself—that was the wolf chased away; now only the lion remained.

Just then a great camel caravan, laden with goods and merchandise, entered the forest. The leading camel had around its neck a large bell that clanged loudly with every step the camel took. The noise rang out through the forest. 'What is that noise?' cried the lion, startled. 'Chaturaka, my friend, run and find out, what is making that racket?'

Chaturaka ran off obediently through the trees. Seeing the camel caravan, he smiled to himself. He had another nefarious idea! Pretending to be greatly alarmed, he ran back, panting and gasping, to the lion. 'Run, run, run for your life,' he cried.

'Why, what is the matter?' asked the lion, puzzled.

'Run, master, run! It is Yamaraj, the god of death himself! He is furious with you because you killed the camel before it was time for him to die. He has now come to punish you. With him has come a vast herd of camels, the spirits of Shankukarna's ancestors, all intent on revenge. The sound you hear is the bell that the foremost camel wears about his neck. They want your life, master! Run! Save yourself!'

Vajradanstra peered through the trees and saw the caravan. It all seemed to be as Chaturaka had said! Terrified, the lion abandoned the camel's carcass and ran away as fast as he could!

Chaturaka, the clever jackal, laughed in glee. The camel's flesh was all his to feast upon—it would last him for a month at least if not more! 'A little thinking is all it takes to get whatever I want! And what's more, nobody knows what I have done—so what can be better than that?' he sang.

'And so I say, O Karataka,' concluded Damanaka, 'the one who thinks shrewdly enough will get what he wants, and no blame will fall on him, even if his plotting and scheming harms others.'

Meanwhile, Sanjivaka was still worrying over all that Damanaka had told him. 'Why have I been so foolish?' he asked himself. 'Here I am, a peaceful creature who lives on grass, not harming anyone. What was I thinking—to become friends with a carnivorous lion? And now I am stuck, a slave, and in his power. This is nobody's fault but my own—I have brought this on myself.' Sanjivaka paced worriedly back and forth. 'Now what should I do? Where can I go? How will I find peace

of mind again?' he wept. 'Even if I were to go away,' he reasoned to himself, 'I would be killed and eaten by some other ferocious beast. It is better to die at Pingalaka's hands. It has been said that to be defeated by an illustrious and powerful warrior is to partake of some of that warrior's glory, and there is no warrior more noble than Pingalaka. So it is best I let him kill me.' Sanjivaka began walking towards the lion's lair with slow, despondent steps.

As he approached the lion's den, he saw Pingalaka sitting outside, in exactly the same angry posture that Damanaka had described. This frightened and upset Sanjivaka so much that he stopped and backed away, as far away from him as he could.

When Sanjivaka did not greet him as he usually did, Pingalaka became convinced that every word that Damanaka had said was true, that Sanjivaka really did intend to kill him. With a roar the lion pounced upon the bull, tearing his flesh with his sharp claws. The bull, in self-defence, struck back, goring the lion with his horns. Torn and bleeding, the two mighty creatures faced each other, ready to attack or defend.

Karataka, watching, turned to Damanaka and cried, 'You fool, what you have done is not right! You should never have allowed this battle between Pingalaka and Sanjivaka! Now the king may die. And if he survives, and kills Sanjivaka instead, then you would have made him murder an innocent creature and no animal will ever trust him again! So if you are really as smart as you say you are, you need to find a way to end this battle between Pingalaka and Sanjivaka before it is too late!'

Karataka paced angrily up and down. 'What a fool you are, Damanaka! Do you not know that violence is the solution of last resort, to be used only when all else fails, and even then it is to be avoided? Extreme solutions should not be used where gentler methods might work. Your scheming has resulted in conflict. The true test of a good minister lies in his ability to end conflict and enmity and establish friendship and peace. You are not fit to be a minister!' Karataka shook his head in disgust. 'What is the use of saying anything to you? Why do I waste my breath in giving you advice? After all, it is said

A stick of dry wood cannot be bent
A block of hard stone is difficult to cut
In this way, O Suchimukha,
It is difficult to tutor a student who lacks the ability to learn.'

‘And how is that?’ asked Damanaka.

So Karataka told him the story of the monkeys and the tailorbird.

The Story of the Monkeys and the Tailorbird

Once, in a faraway land, a troop of monkeys lived upon the steep, bare side of a tall mountain. During the summer months, the mountainside was warm and pleasant and the monkeys knew no want. But in winter would come the rain and snow, and the monkeys would shiver in misery.

One winter, it was very cold, colder than it had ever been before, and the mountain was covered with snow. The monkeys were huddled together in a wet, miserable bunch, and no matter what they did, they could not warm themselves.

Suddenly, the wind blew something small and bright towards them. It was a cluster of red gunj seeds, the kind that jewellers use to weigh gold. 'Look, look, what's that? They are as bright as sparks from a flame! They must be fire!' they cried. And gathering up the tiny red seeds, they piled them in a little heap and began to blow upon them, in the hope of making a great big fire. But no matter how hard they blew upon the red seeds, the monkeys could not get a flame.

A little tailorbird called Suchimukha sat upon a nearby rock watching the monkeys. What were they doing? Surely even they must know that gunj seeds don't give fire? He watched in silence for a while, then, unable to stop himself, called out, 'Hey monkeys, what are you doing? Are you complete fools? Can you not see that these are little seeds, not warm red coals or sparks of fire! Instead of wasting your time with these, I suggest you get out of the wind, find a nice, warm cave, and shelter there till the weather improves!'

The monkeys ignored the bird, and continued blowing upon their pile of seeds—all except one old monkey, who said, 'You are the fool, not we, you stupid bird! Why do you interfere with us? Our actions are no concern of yours. Fly away and leave us in peace! Have you not heard it said

Don't talk to a man unsuccessful at work
Don't talk to a gambler who has lost at dice
Don't talk to a man who has big problems
For you will only get insults in return.

‘We have problems. Leave us alone!’

But Suchimukha disregarded the old monkey’s words. ‘Come on, go find that cave, you will never get warm this way,’ he cried.

‘Be quiet, you stupid bird!’ cried all the monkeys. ‘We don’t want your opinion, we don’t want your advice! Flap your wings and go away!’

Suchimukha would not stop. ‘Find some shelter! Find a cave! Hurry, before the snow comes again!’ he called out again.

At last, one of the monkeys, irritated beyond endurance, grabbed the little bird in his paws, and flung him against a rock and killed him.

Poor Suchimukha. He died for giving advice to fools.

‘And that is why I say, O Damanaka, that one should not try to teach a person who is incapable of learning,’ concluded Karataka. ‘By giving advice to fools, we make them angry, not happy. And also, one should not give advice to just anyone, but only to those who will appreciate it. See how that monkey destroyed the little sparrow’s home because she gave him advice!’

‘Oh! And how did that happen?’ asked Damanaka.

So Karataka told him the story of the monkey and the sparrow.

The Story of the Monkey and the Sparrow

Once, deep in a forest stood a shami tree. In its long branches, in a little nest, lived a pair of sparrows. The birds lacked for nothing in their cosy little home. The days passed happily for them, in love and sunshine.

When winter came, it brought bad weather and rain and cold. But the sparrows stayed warm and snug in their nest. One freezing day, when the wind was colder than usual and the rain did not stop, a monkey came looking for shelter. Wet and cold and miserable, he came and stood under the sparrows' tree. He was so cold that his teeth chattered and would not stop.

The sparrows peeped out of their warm nest and saw the monkey. Seeing him so miserable, the female sparrow called out, 'What is the matter? Why do you stand here in this damp and dismal fashion? You look like a man, and have the hands and feet of a human. So why don't you build yourself a house and stay warm and dry inside?'

The monkey looked up at the perky bird, and saw her snug in her little nest. 'Be quiet, you silly little bird,' he shouted in annoyance. 'How dare you give me advice?' The monkey scowled angrily at the sparrow and thought, 'This tiny bird is laughing at me! She thinks she's very clever! But she is just a rude and annoying little creature! I'll teach her to chirp at me like that!' He shook his fist angrily at the sparrow and cried, 'Don't you worry your head over me! Why do you care what state I am in? Don't think that I will talk to you, you silly little, rude little bird! It has been said, and rightly so,

Confide your sorrows only to a kind and compassionate soul
Don't talk of them to one who does not care
For to do the latter is like crying in the wilderness—
pointless.'

Little remains to be told: the irritated monkey climbed swiftly up the shami tree, and tore the sparrows' nest to pieces.

'And so I say,' concluded Karataka, 'that one should not give advice to

everyone.' He sighed and shook his head. 'Just as the monkey did not listen to the sparrow, you did not listen to my advice. But that is not your fault, for you do not have the ability to understand good advice. It is I who should not have wasted my words on you. Besides, you are one of those who take pleasure in causing misery to others even if it results in trouble for themselves! Cleverness such as yours, which you use for your own selfish ends, can never lead to anything good. As in the story of Dharmabuddhi and Papabuddhi,

Papabuddhi was too clever by half
His father was nearly suffocated by the smoke.'

'How did that happen?' asked Damanaka.

So Karataka told him the story of Dharmabuddhi and Papabuddhi.

The Story of Dharmabuddhi and Papabuddhi

Once, in a little town, there lived two young men. Dharmabuddhi was intelligent, upright and honest, while Papabuddhi was wicked and mean. Although they were so different from each other, they were friends.

One day, Papabuddhi thought to himself, 'I have no money, nor am I clever enough to make some on my own. But I cannot live a life of poverty forever. So I will ask Dharmabuddhi for help and persuade him to come with me to seek our fortunes. His wit and charm and intelligence will make rich men of us. Once we have earned enough, I will take his wealth as well as my own, and, becoming doubly rich, will live in comfort ever after!'

And so Papabuddhi went up to Dharmabuddhi and said, 'My dear friend, I am very worried. Our youth is slipping by, and we have nothing to show for our days on earth so far, no brave deeds of valour, no high adventure, not even travel in a foreign land! What memories shall we have to look back upon when we are old and grey? What stories shall we have to tell our grandchildren? It is time, my friend, to step out of our little town. After all, it has been said that a man who has not travelled to foreign lands, learnt new skills and made his fortune, has not lived.'

Dharmabuddhi loved his friend's suggestion. So, a few days later, the two friends said goodbye to their parents and set off to see the world. They travelled far and wide, and Dharmabuddhi's great charm and sharp wits brought them wealth and fame. At last the friends had earned enough to last them a lifetime. 'Perhaps it's time we went back?' they said, and, greatly pleased with themselves, they set off towards home.

As they neared their little town, Papabuddhi said, 'Dharmabuddhi, my old friend, it is not wise to carry all our hard-earned wealth at once into town. Everyone will want a share and soon there will be nothing left for us. Let us bury most of our money in a safe and secret spot outside the town and carry just a small amount of it home with us. We can always come and dig up more as and when we need it.'

'As always you are right, Papabuddhi,' agreed Dharmabuddhi. 'Let

us do as you say.'

So the two men buried their money in an earthen pot under a shami tree in the forest, and returned home to their respective families.

But Papabuddhi, whose mind was full of evil thoughts, was still working his wicked plot. So one night, as the rest of the town lay sleeping, he crept into the forest and dug up the earthen pot with their money. Quickly emptying the coins into a bag he had carried for this purpose, he put back the empty pot into the ground and carefully covered it up again. Then he crept back through the town and hid the money in his own house.

A few days later, he went up to Dharmabuddhi and said, 'Friend, as you know, I have a large family, and I have spent the money that we had brought with us. Let us go together to our secret spot so that I may dig up some more of my share of the money.'

Dharmabuddhi agreed readily and accompanied Papabuddhi to the forest where they had buried their money. Together, they dug up the earthen pot, but of course, the pot was empty. 'What is this, Papabuddhi? Where is our gold?' asked Dharmabuddhi.

'Our treasure! You have stolen our treasure, Dharmabuddhi!' cried Papabuddhi. 'It must be you! Who else knew of our spot? And who else would so cleverly bury the empty pot again? Return my share to me at once, you thief, or I will complain about you to the judges!'

'How dare you accuse me!' thundered Dharmabuddhi. 'Don't ever again speak to me like this. I am Dharmabuddhi, the righteous one! I do not steal from other men!'

Arguing and accusing each other, the two men reached the court. The judges, unable to decide who was guilty, declared a trial by fire. 'Let the sacred flames decide,' they said. 'Let both men step into the fire—the innocent man will come through unscathed, the guilty man will perish!'

'Trial by fire is illegal in this case,' protested Papabuddhi. 'In such matters, written evidence must first be read. If that is missing, then we need eyewitness accounts to be heard. Only when witnesses cannot be found can trial by fire be pronounced! But I have a witness—he is the spirit of the shami tree under which we had buried our wealth. He has seen the thief, as have the spirits of the other trees in the forest. They will be my witnesses.'

The judges agreed to allow the spirits of the trees as witnesses and declared that the two men should meet them the following morning in the forest.

Papabuddhi was pleased with his own quick thinking, but though he

had escaped the fire, he now needed someone to be the spirit of the shami tree! He ran to his old father for help and cried, ‘Father! I have stolen Dharmabuddhi’s money! If you help me we can keep all that gold for ourselves, otherwise we will lose all the money and our lives too!’

The old man was as unscrupulous as his son. ‘Quick, tell me what I must do so that we can keep the money for ourselves!’ he cried.

‘The trunk of the shami tree is hollow,’ said Papabuddhi. ‘You must hide inside that hollow trunk, and tomorrow morning, when the judges arrive, you must shout as loudly as you can that Dharmabuddhi is the thief.’ The old man agreed to the plan and set off at once for the forest where he hid himself in the trunk of the shami tree.

The next morning, Papabuddhi led the judges into the forest. Dharmabuddhi was there as well, as were all the men and women from the town. Gathering the judges around the tree in a circle he called upon the spirit of the shami tree. ‘Speak out, speak out, O spirit of the tree, and tell us who amongst us is the thief!’ he cried.

His father, hiding inside the tree, replied in a deep and rumbling voice. ‘Good people, listen carefully!’ he called. ‘The missing treasure that you seek has been stolen by Dharmabuddhi!’

The judges, amazed and astonished, began to debate and discuss the matter amongst themselves. Meanwhile, Dharmabuddhi wasted no time. He had noticed the hollow trunk of the shami tree and while the judges argued amongst themselves, he quickly gathered some dry leaves and twigs and piling them at the foot of the tree, quickly lit a fire. Within minutes, the hollow trunk was filled with smoke, and out tumbled Papabuddhi’s father, coughing and choking and gasping for breath.

‘Who are you? Where have you come from? Why do you choke?’ asked the startled judges all together.

Wheezing and gasping, the old man told them the whole sorry truth. The judges shook their heads in disapproval. They ordered Papabuddhi to return all the stolen money to Dharmabuddhi and punished him severely.

Praising Dharmabuddhi’s wit and honesty, they declared, ‘It is said and rightly so,

A truly clever man will always,
When presenting a solution,
Consider the drawbacks of his plan
Before its execution

The silly heron in his haste did not
The mongoose killed and ate the lot.'

'How did that happen?' asked Dharmabuddhi.

So the judges told him the story of the heron and the mongoose.

The Story of the Heron and the Mongoose

Once, beside a lake in a forest, there grew a large banyan tree. In its tangled branches, a colony of herons had built their nests—large, untidy platforms of grass and twigs—where they laid their eggs and raised their chicks.

One day, a big, black cobra came and made its home at the foot of the tree. The heron chicks were easy prey for the snake, and the snake grew fat and contented in his new home. But the herons, who had once lived in peace and security in their tree, now lived in constant dread of their chicks being stolen away and eaten.

A heron who had lost all his children to the snake sat in tears by the lake. A crab watched him warily, and when the heron showed no signs of gobbling him up, edged closer to him and asked, 'Uncle, what is wrong? Why are you crying?'

'Ah crab,' wept the heron, 'the cobra who lives among the roots of our tree has eaten up all my little children. If you know how to kill that horrible snake, please tell me.'

'This heron is my natural enemy,' said the crab to himself. 'I can never be friends with him or any of his kind. This is my chance to get rid of them all. I will pretend to give him advice, but will do so in a way that will destroy the entire heron colony. After all, it has been said

When dealing with your enemy,
Harden your heart till it turns to stone
Be ruthless, show no mercy
Yet use sweet words to fool him and lure him
Into a situation that destroys him.'

So, sidling up to the weeping heron, the crab suggested a plan. 'Uncle,' he said, 'why don't you lay a trail of fish between the serpent's lair and a mongoose's den? The mongoose will follow the trail to the snake and kill that evil creature for you. My plan is guaranteed to work, for we all know that a mongoose can make short work of even the most fierce cobra.'

The heron liked the plan and did as the crab had advised. The plan went exactly as the crab had said it would—the mongoose followed the trail of fish to the snake's den and killed him.

Unfortunately for the herons, the mongoose, having discovered their nests as a result of this plan, became a regular visitor to the tree and soon ate up all their eggs and fledgling chicks, and then one by one the adult birds, till not a heron remained alive in that colony.

This was how the clever crab, without lifting a claw, rid himself of his mortal enemies. The heron rid himself of the cobra, but invited in another danger that cost him and the others their lives.

'And so,' said the judges, 'that is why we say that a wise man always thinks not just of a solution, but also of the consequences of any plan that he makes. The heron did not do so, and so he died.'

'And neither did Papabuddhi, which is why his father was nearly suffocated by smoke,' said Karataka to Damanaka. 'You, Damanaka,' continued Karataka, 'are like Papabuddhi. You thought up a plan to achieve your own selfish ends, but did not for a moment stop to think of what harm could result from your plotting. It is because of your selfish scheming that our king and master is, even at this very moment, fighting for his life against his best and most beloved friend. You have shown me your true nature—you are wicked, selfish and cruel. Like Papabuddhi, you too cannot be trusted. From today, do not come near me, or try to be friends with me any more. If you can do what you have done to our king, then what chance do lesser mortals like I have of being safe from your evil manipulations? After all, it has been said

Where one strange event can happen
There another can happen as well.
Where iron scales can be eaten up by mice
There a hawk flying off with a boy
Should occasion no surprise.'

'How was that?' asked Damanaka.

So Karataka told him the story of the iron scales and the merchant.

The Story of the Iron Scales and the Merchant

In a city far away, there lived a merchant called Jirnadhan. He had once been a wealthy man, but lost all his riches overnight in a bad business deal. 'The people in this city know me as a rich man and treat me with great respect. But now that I have lost all my money, they will only make fun of me,' he thought and resolved to travel to strange and distant lands to seek his fortune.

Now Jirnadhan owned a pair of heavy iron scales. These had been made by his forefathers and handed down from father to son for generations. Jirnadhan did not want to lose these scales or have them stolen in his absence. So before he left, he took the iron scales to another merchant in the town and said, 'Friend, please look after these scales for me until I return from my travels. This is the only item of value I possess. I do not want to sell them or have them stolen while I am away.' The other merchant promised to look after the scales and keep them safe till his friend returned, and Jirnadhan, reassured, left on his travels with an easy mind.

Months passed, and Jirnadhan, once again a wealthy man, returned home. He went at once to the merchant's house and said, 'Friend, I am back at last and have to take the pair of iron scales that I had left with you for safekeeping.'

Now the other merchant wanted to keep the iron scales for himself. So putting on a sad face, he said, 'Ah Jirnadhan, my friend, I have some sad news for you: in your absence a plague of rats attacked my home and ate up your iron scales. Nothing remains of them, not even a scrap.'

'Ah well, it is not your fault,' sighed Jirnadhan, philosophically. 'Rats are beyond our control, and we must bear the damage that they do with fortitude. As the wise men say, this world is but an illusion and nothing lasts forever, not even iron scales. Anyway, I am off to the river to bathe. Could you send your son with me, to carry my things and watch them whilst I bathe?'

The other merchant, relieved that Jirnadhan had believed his story, was eager to oblige him. He called his son at once and, introducing Jirnadhan to him as his uncle, bade him carry his things down to the

river. ‘Your uncle wishes to bathe. Stay with him and look after his things for him,’ he said.

The merchant’s son did as his father ordered, and followed Jirnadhan to the river. After his bath, Jirnadhan hid the merchant’s son in a cave by the riverbank, and, telling the boy to stay there till he returned for him, strolled back into the town.

The merchant, seeing him return alone, came running up. ‘Where is my son?’ he asked anxiously.

‘Ah, friend, a hawk carried off your son as he waited by the water’s edge with my things,’ said Jirnadhan, shaking his head in pretended sorrow.

‘A hawk cannot carry off a boy!’ protested the merchant. ‘You are lying! Tell me the truth! Where is my son?’

‘I am telling you the truth—a hawk flew off with your son!’ insisted Jirnadhan.

The distraught merchant pleaded, begged, threatened, but Jirnadhan stuck to his story. ‘The hawk has your son, not I,’ he said.

Arguing and shouting, the two men reached the courts of justice. ‘This man has kidnapped my son!’ wept the merchant, falling at the judges’ feet.

‘Kidnapped your son? That is unforgivable!’ cried the judges. ‘Return the boy to his father at once!’ they commanded Jirnadhan.

‘I would do so if I could,’ said Jirnadhan with a sigh. ‘But I don’t have the child. He was carried off in front of my eyes by a fierce, sharp-taloned hawk. The hawk has the boy, not I,’ said Jirnadhan.

The judges frowned suspiciously at his story. ‘Can a hawk really fly away with a boy? It seems hard to believe!’ they said.

‘No harder to believe, good sirs, than rats eating up a pair of heavy iron scales!’ declared Jirnadhan. ‘If that is believable, then what is so unbelievable about a hawk flying away with a child?’

‘What do you mean by that? Explain yourself! Don’t talk in riddles!’ commanded the judges.

So Jirnadhan told the judges his story—how he had decided to go away, how he had trusted his friend, the merchant, and left his precious pair of iron scales in his safekeeping, and how, when he had returned, the merchant had not returned his scales but claimed that they had been eaten by rats. ‘And so I say—his son has been carried off by a hawk!’ declared Jirnadhan.

‘What an unnecessary fuss!’ cried the judges and ordered both men to end their quarrel. ‘Return his pair of iron scales to him at once,’ they ordered the merchant. ‘Bring back that poor boy from wherever

you have hidden him and return him to his father immediately,' they ordered Jirnadhan.

The men did as the judges commanded—the merchant returned the pair of iron scales, and Jirnadhan fetched the merchant's son and returned him to his father. But Jirnadhan had made his point: if the merchant's impossible story was taken to be true, then his own impossible story should also be taken as true.

'In other words,' concluded Karataka, 'if one strange or impossible event can take place, then so can another. If you could put our king in his present difficult and unpleasant situation, then you could do the same to me and to the other animals. You cannot be trusted any more!' Karataka paced up and down unhappily. 'You could not bear Sanjivaka's happiness, so you plotted and schemed and brought us all to this evil pass,' he continued bitterly. 'It has been rightly said that the unlettered man is jealous of the learned, the poor man is jealous of the rich, and the sinner of the pious. This is the natural order of this world. You, too, have behaved according to your nature, and pulled down to your level the noble Sanjivaka. In claiming to help Pingalaka, you have in fact harmed him. It has been said

No good comes of a fool's friendship,
While even the enmity of a learned man can be of great benefit—
Thus did the foolish monkey kill the king
And the learned thief save the four merchants.'

'How did that happen?' asked Damanaka.

So Karataka told him the story of the king and the monkey, and the story of the thief and the four merchants.

The Story of the King and the Monkey

Once, a king kept a monkey as a pet. The king loved the monkey, and the monkey was devoted to the king.

One hot and sultry afternoon, the king decided to take a nap. As he lay snoozing upon his bed, the faithful monkey sat beside him waving a fan to keep his master cool. Suddenly, a fly flew in through the open window, buzzing noisily. It flew around the king's bed and alighted on the king's chest.

'Shoo, go away!' the monkey waved his fan to chase the fly away. But the fly was not at all afraid and would not go away. The monkey tried again, waving his fan, waving his arms, even waving his tail and hopping up and down. But his efforts were in vain—the stubborn fly refused to budge and continued sitting upon the king's broad and royal chest.

At last, the monkey picked up the king's sword, and struck the fly a mighty blow. The fly flew away unharmed—but the king, severely wounded by the monkey's blow, died at once.

'And so,' said Karataka, 'a king who wants to live a long and happy life, should not have foolish friends, no matter how loyal and devoted they are!'

Karataka then continued to tell Damanaka the story of the thief and the four merchants.

The Story of the Thief and the Four Merchants

Once, in a certain town, there lived a brahmin. He was an educated man, wise and learned, but, due to his misdeeds in an earlier life, he had been condemned to become a thief in his present one.

One day, as he prowled around the marketplace looking for something to steal, he saw four men, whose strange clothes and different accents marked them out as strangers from another land. They were loaded with precious goods—fine cloths and fragrant oils, glittering jewels and colourful gems—which they were selling in the marketplace for gold.

The thief's eyes sparkled with greed when he saw them. 'I must make friends with them and win their trust,' he said to himself. 'Once I have gained their confidence, it will be easy for me to steal their gold.'

Pleased with his plan, the thief went up to the four merchants, and, introducing himself, began to chat with them. His education and learning impressed the merchants greatly, and they enjoyed his company. But the merchants were wary, and guarded their goods and their gold with great care, so that the thief could not get his hands upon their riches.

At last, the merchants sold all their wares, and decided to set off for home. Now, to keep their gold safe from robbers on the road, instead of carrying it in a bag upon their persons, they decided to swallow it. 'That way no one will ever know we have this money,' they said to each other.

The thief watched in dismay as they swallowed the gold. Now how was he to steal it? He desperately racked his brains for a plan. At last he said, 'Friends, in these few weeks that you have been here, you have become so dear to me that I cannot bear the thought of living here without you. Please take me with you as your assistant so I can continue to be close to you.' He begged and pleaded and wept, till at last the four merchants agreed to take him with them.

And so the five men set off on their journey. All went well till a few days later when they reached a village called Palipur. In this village lived a fierce, criminal tribe known as the Kirata. The men of this tribe

would waylay unsuspecting travellers and rob them of their money. Their lookouts were crows trained to spot approaching strangers. Whenever the crows, perched high up on the trees or flying in the sky overhead, saw travellers approaching the town, they would start a raucous cawing. As the five men came up to Palipur, the crows began calling, 'Rich men coming! Hurry, hurry, kill them and take their money!'

The Kiratas came rushing out of their huts, and stopped the five travellers with loud cries. 'We have no money,' cried the merchants. But the Kiratas would not believe them, and grabbing hold of the men, they searched them from head to toe. But the merchants were carrying their wealth inside their stomachs, so the Kiratas found nothing, not gold nor precious stones nor coins of any kind.

'The crows have never been wrong, and the crows say you are rich men, so rich men you must be!' frowned the Kirata chief. 'Hand over your money, and leave here with your lives. Otherwise, we will kill you and rip your stomachs open!'

The merchants grew pale with fear. Only the thief kept his wits about him. 'If the Kiratas kill these four men, they will find their money, and then, thinking me to be equally rich, they will kill me too; but, if they kill me first, they will find nothing, and believing the others to be equally poor, they may let them go,' he reasoned. 'I am to die in any case, so why not I save these merchants' lives by offering mine? After all, it has been said

Why are you afraid of death?
Fear will not save you,
For death does not spare anyone
We are mortal, so we must die
A hundred years later, if not today.'

Thus thinking and reasoning with himself, the wise and learned thief stepped forward. 'Kill me first!' he cried.

The Kiratas obligingly did as asked and struck off his head. They searched his body thoroughly and, of course, found nothing. 'The man was right, he carries no wealth,' they cried, disappointed. And believing now that the other four were also all equally poor, the Kiratas let them go.

'And that is why I say,' concluded Karataka, 'that it is better to have a learned man for an enemy than a fool for a friend—the former may

benefit you, but the latter will only cause you trouble!'

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While Karataka and Damanaka were busy arguing, Sanjivaka and Pingalaka were locked in combat. They were evenly matched. Sometimes Sanjivaka had the upper hand, and sometimes Pingalaka did. At last Pingalaka, with his sharp claws and ferocious teeth, succeeded in wounding Sanjivaka so grievously that Sanjivaka fell to the ground, dead.

Seeing his friend lying dead before him, Pingalaka began to weep, 'Oh, how could I have done this? I lost my mind and was led astray, and in my madness I killed my dearest friend. What bigger wrong is there in this world than betraying a friend? It is better that I had lost my kingdom—a kingdom that is lost may be recovered through war, but a friend who is dead is gone forever!' The lion fell to the ground beside Sanjivaka's body. 'Ah Sanjivaka, Sanjivaka,' he lamented. 'I always praised you to my people. Now, when they ask me about you, what shall I say? That Sanjivaka, whom I loved so much, is dead, and that it is I who killed him? And hearing that, will anyone ever trust me again?'

Damanaka, hearing Pingalaka's wails of grief, ran up to him and said, 'Sire, stop! Such grieving does not become a king. Do not mourn the death of a traitor. There is no sin in killing a person who wished to kill you, even if that person were your father, your mother, a son or a brother! A king who lets his enemy escape out of misplaced compassion does not deserve to rule. A king must change his nature according to need—he should be truthful when necessary, but lie easily if required. Sometimes he must be kind and gentle, sometimes cruel and merciless. Sometimes he must give freely and generously, sometimes withhold all favour. And then, to be truly great and to be looked upon as such, a king cannot be mild and humble. He must be loud and dominant, believing in himself and all his actions. You must not show remorse. The wise do not worry about life and death, but do what needs to be done. So let it be with you, O king.'

Pingalaka, accepting the comfort that Damanaka's words offered, stopped grieving over Sanjivaka's death, and with Damanaka at his side as minister, resumed his duties as king.

'And this,' said Vishnusharma, 'brings to an end the first part of your lessons.'

Part 2

The Gaining of Friends

Vishnusharma said to the three princes, 'I will now start the second part of your lessons, on how friends may be made and friendships gained. Clever, wise and learned people, even without wealth or money, can accomplish their aims with the help of friends, as did the crow, the mouse, the turtle and the deer. Listen now to their story.'

The Story of the Crow, the Mouse, the Turtle and the Deer

It has been heard that in a kingdom in the south, there lies the fair city of Mahilaropya. Not far from this city, there grows a vast and ancient banyan tree that provides food and shelter to all kinds of creatures. Birds of all kinds come to this tree to feast on its fruit, while hundreds of tiny insects make their home in its trunk. Deer take shelter from the fierce sun in its shade, monkeys play amongst its branches and honeybees sip the nectar from its flowers.

Once, a crow called Laghupatanaka made his home upon a branch of this tree. One morning, as he flew about in search of food, he saw creeping towards the tree a foul and loathsome hunter. The man was carrying a net for snaring birds in one hand, and a stout stick in the other. With his bloodshot eyes, knotted hair and fierce frown, he was as frightening as death itself. 'Oh! Oh! He looks like trouble!' said Laghupatanaka to himself. 'I am sure he intends to catch and kill the birds that live on my tree. I had better warn them at once!'

The crow flew back to the tree as fast as he could, and gathered together all the birds that lived there. 'An evil hunter is on his way here,' he warned. 'He carries a net in his hand, and poisoned grains of rice in his pocket. He will spread his net on the ground and then scatter the grains of rice to tempt you. Do not be fooled by him. Stay away from the scattered rice, treat it like poison, for it is there only to lure you into his net.'

Laghupatanaka had barely finished speaking when the birds saw the hunter approach the tree. He did exactly as the crow had said he would—he spread his net upon the ground and, scattering grains of rice to attract the birds, he hid himself in a nearby bush and waited. But the birds that lived on the tree heeded the crow's warning, and not a single one went near the scattered rice.

Just then, the king of the pigeons, Chitragriva, was flying by in search of food. With him were his family, and his hundreds of followers and attendants. Chitragriva, seeing the grains of rice scattered upon the ground, was greatly tempted. 'Stop, don't eat that rice, it's a trap,' called out Laghupatanaka. But Chitragriva was

hungry, and the little white grains of rice upon the ground looked too delicious to pass up! Disregarding the crow's warning, Chitragriva and his followers fell greedily upon the rice—and found themselves entangled in the hunter's net.

The hunter was overjoyed. Grabbing his stick, he jumped out of hiding and began to run towards the tree. Seeing him coming, Chitragriva said to his followers, 'Birds, do not be afraid of the hunter, and above all, do not panic. It is said and wisely so, that those who stay calm in times of trouble and keep their courage and their wits about them can overcome the greatest difficulties. So if we can somehow fly away with the hunter's net, we can, once we are out of his reach, free ourselves from this trap. But we must work together. Alone, each one of us is too weak to escape the hunter, but together, we will become strong enough to fly away with his net. If we do not work together, we will surely die. So do not be afraid, but do as I say: wait for my word and then fly up, everyone together, carrying the net with us.'

The pigeons did as their king commanded: upon his word they flew up, all together, the entire flock, carrying the net effortlessly with them. The hunter ran after them, cursing and shouting. 'They have flown away with my net,' he said, 'but they are sure to argue and fight amongst themselves, and then they will fall to the ground.'

Meanwhile, Laghupatanaka the crow had been watching with great interest. Curious to know what would become of the pigeons, he gave up his plans to search for food and followed Chitragriva and his flock as they flew off with the net.

Chitragriva, seeing the hunter following them, kept calm and, with encouraging words, kept the flock together. He led them over dense forests and uneven ground, where the hunter found it difficult to follow, and very soon the birds had left the hunter far behind. At last, the hunter gave up the chase and went home lamenting. 'Not only did I lose a day's catch,' he wept, 'but I have also lost my net, the only way I had to earn a living.'

When Chitragriva saw that the hunter had turned back, he said to his flock, 'Now that we have shaken off that wicked hunter, let us go to the city of Mahilaropya. There, in its northeast corner, lives my friend, the mouse Hiranyaka. He will free us from these bonds. After all, it is a well-known fact that in times of trouble, only a true friend will be of help; all others will turn away.'

The pigeons followed Chitragriva's directions, and very soon they came to the city; finding their way to the mouse's home, they alighted

outside it. Now the cautious Hiranyaka had turned his little mouse-hole into a veritable fortress. He had created innumerable secret exits and dug long winding tunnels beneath the ground, so that it was impossible for a predator to reach him or surprise him. The mouse, safe from all danger, lived in his hole in peace.

Chitragriva stood at the entrance to the mouse-hole and called out. 'Hiranyaka, my dearest friend, come out, come out quickly! I am in great trouble and need your help.'

Hiranyaka, who was a very cautious mouse indeed, did not step out, but replied warily from within, 'Who are you? Why have you come here? What kind of trouble are you in?'

'Hiranyaka, I am your friend, king of the pigeons, Chitragriva. Please come out. I need your help urgently.'

Recognizing the pigeon's voice at last, the mouse ran joyfully out of his hole. After all, it is true that a dear friend's company is always delightful and the heart never tires of it. But when he saw Chitragriva and the other pigeons entangled in the net, his joy changed to concern. 'Friend, how did you get into this state?' he asked.

'You know me well, and still you ask me this!' said Chitragriva. 'It was my greed of course, my love for food, that got me into this mess. Now please don't delay any more, but get us out of this fix.'

'Birds can see a speck of food from several miles away, but when fate decrees otherwise, they do not see the net a few feet away!' said Hiranyaka. 'When I see someone as wise as you caught in a net in this manner, then I am tempted to believe that fate is greater than intelligence. When birds that soar free in the sky are caught in a net upon the ground, when fish that swim in the boundless ocean are caught on a fisherman's hook, then who is free, what place is safe, it is impossible to say. Ultimately, death reaches us all, gathers us all up in his arms and carries us off.' Thus lamenting the inevitability of fate, Hiranyaka began to gnaw at the net that entangled his friend.

'My friend, stop!' cried Chitragriva. 'First, cut the bonds of my followers, and when they are free, only then free me.'

'That would not be right,' protested Hiranyaka. 'You are the king and must be first! I will free you first and only then think of the others!'

'No, do not say that, friend,' said Chitragriva. 'The others are under my protection. They have left their homes to follow me. Should I not show them this little consideration? Also, remember that a king's power is derived from the trust his people place in him, and a king who respects his followers and looks after them in times of trouble

wins their trust forever. And one more thing—what if you break your teeth as you gnaw through my bonds? I could not stand by and watch my people suffer while I soar free! What kind of a cruel and selfish king would that make me? So please do as I say and free my people before you free me.'

'I am aware of the duties of a king, my friend,' said Hiranyaka, 'and I was but testing you. By putting your people before you, and looking upon them with compassion and consideration, you have shown yourself to be a good and wise king. I will do as you say and free your followers before freeing you.' So saying, the mouse quickly gnawed through the net and in no time he had freed all the pigeons and Chitragriva as well. 'There, you are now free to fly away wherever you wish,' he said. 'If you are ever in trouble again, or need my help, do not hesitate to call upon me.' And saying goodbye to the pigeons, Hiranyaka retired once more into his mouse-hole.

Meanwhile, perched upon a nearby tree, Laghupatanaka the crow had been watching and listening with growing astonishment and awe. 'This Hiranyaka is a very useful fellow to know, ' he said to himself. 'He is intelligent and has even built a fortress for himself. And look how easily he freed the pigeons! He could be of great help to me if I were ever to find myself in a similar predicament. I must make him my friend! After all, no matter how clever and accomplished a person is, everyone needs a friend.' And flying down to the entrance of the mouse-hole, he called out as Chitragriva had done. 'Friend Hiranyaka, come out, come out quickly!'

'Who could that be calling me now? Could it be that one of the pigeons is still entangled in the net and needs me?' wondered the mouse. Wary as ever, he did not step out but called from within as he had done before, 'Who are you? Identify yourself!'

'I am Laghupatanaka the crow,' answered the crow.

'Please go away at once!' cried the mouse, retreating deeper into his hole in fright.

'I have come to you with a very urgent request,' said the crow. 'Why will you not come out and meet me?'

'I have no need or desire to meet you!' declared the mouse.

'But, sir, I saw how you freed Chitragriva, the pigeon king, and his followers from that dreadful net. As a result, I have great respect and affection for you in my heart. If I am ever caught as the pigeons were, I could, by your grace, become free again like the pigeons. Therefore, I would like to be your friend. Please accept my friendship.'

'How can we be friends?' cried the mouse. 'You are a predator, and I

am your prey! Do not seek my friendship but go away from here at once! Friendship is possible and meaningful only amongst those who are equal in strength, wealth and social status. A man who seeks to be friends with someone stronger or weaker than himself soon becomes a laughing stock. So please, go away and leave me in peace.'

'Friend Hiranyaka,' said Laghupatanaka, 'I am outside your door and here I will stay till you become my friend. I will not eat or drink till you accept my friendship, but will starve to death on your doorstep instead.'

'You are my mortal enemy!' cried the mouse. 'How can I be your friend? After all, no matter how hot the water, it still puts out the fire!'

'Hiranyaka, why are you making such illogical statements?' protested the crow. 'We haven't even met each other yet, so how can you decide that I am your mortal enemy?'

'There are two kinds of enmity,' replied the mouse. 'The first kind is the natural enmity that exists between certain creatures, while the second kind is the enmity that arises out of a quarrel or an event. You are one of my natural enemies. The enmity that arises out of circumstance may be put to rest, but the natural enmity between two creatures cannot end, not without the end of one of them.'

'This natural enmity that you talk of makes no sense,' said the crow. 'Now listen to me, Hiranyaka. People become friends or enemies with each other because of some reason. So, since there is no cause for us to be enemies, let us be friends. It makes no sense to seek enmity rather than friendship for no reason. I promise you, Hiranyaka, that I will never harm you.'

'I cannot trust you,' replied the mouse, 'and without trust, there is no point being friends. After all, it has been said—never trust an untrustworthy person, or even a trustworthy one beyond a point. A weak man, but a wary one, can escape even the strongest of enemies, while a strong man who trusts too much and foolishly, can be killed by the weakest of enemies.'

Laghupatanaka could not think of a good response to the mouse's statement. 'This mouse is very learned and very intelligent; it is difficult to argue with him,' he thought to himself. 'But isn't it because of his very intelligence that I want to be friends with him?' After thinking a while, he said aloud, 'Wise men say that if one walks with a stranger a few steps, or exchanges a few sentences with him, he becomes a friend. Since we have exchanged more than a few sentences, Hiranyaka, you are now my friend. And now, as my friend,

listen to what I have to say: if you cannot trust me and do not want to step out of your home, then so be it. But as friends, let us talk to each other, tell each other stories and keep each other company.'

'Hmm, this Laghupatanaka seems to be a reasonable sort of bird; maybe friendship with him won't be so bad after all,' thought Hiranyaka, and called out to the crow, 'All right then, I will be your friend, but on one condition: you must promise never to set foot inside my fortress.'

'Friend, I will do as you ask,' promised Laghupatanaka.

And from that day onwards, the two became friends. They would spend all their time together and bring each other gifts. The crow would bring the mouse choice pieces of meat or offerings made at sacrifices, while the mouse would gather rice and other grain for the crow. To give and receive gifts with love, to tell someone your secrets and listen to theirs in return, and to share each other's food—these are the signs of friendship between two people, and the crow and the mouse showed them all. Over time, the mouse began to trust the crow so much that he would often sit nestled under his wings as they chatted and talked.

One day, the crow came to the mouse with tears in his eyes, and, in a voice choking with emotion, said, 'Friend, I am tired of this country. I want to leave and fly away to a new land.'

'Why, what has happened to make you feel this way?' asked the mouse, startled.

'The truth is,' replied the crow, 'that there is famine in this country. No rain has fallen for two years, and the people have nothing to eat. As a result, they do not feed us or set out food for crows any more. Instead, they have set up traps to catch us so they can kill us and eat us. I, too, was caught in one of these traps, but perhaps because I still had life remaining to me, I managed to escape and come here to you. This is the reason I want to leave this country and fly away. I cannot live here any more.'

'Where do you wish to go?' asked Hiranyaka.

'In a land south of here, deep in the middle of a dense forest, there is a vast lake. In that lake lives my dear friend, the turtle Mantharaka. He will give me pieces of fish and other water creatures to eat, and there, by the side of that lake, I will live in peace. I cannot bear to continue here, helplessly watching as birds are caught and eaten in front of my eyes.'

'Well, I, too, am very unhappy in this country,' said the mouse. 'So, if you are leaving, then I would like to go with you.'

‘Why, what is the reason for your unhappiness, my friend?’ asked the crow.

‘It is a long story. I will tell you once we reach your friend’s house,’ replied the mouse.

‘But I will fly through the air while you scamper on the ground,’ said the crow. ‘How will we travel together?’

‘If you are willing, you could carry me on your back,’ suggested the mouse. ‘There is no other way for me to get there.’

When he heard this, the crow was delighted. ‘Then I am truly fortunate, for I will have your company the whole way!’ he exclaimed joyfully. ‘Let’s leave right away. Climb on to my back and hold tight, and I will fly you to the lake in comfort and ease.’

The mouse clambered on to the crow’s back, and the crow flew steadily and carefully to the lake where his friend, Mantharaka the turtle, lived.

As they approached the lake, the turtle saw the mouse on the crow’s back. ‘That is a very odd kind of crow,’ he cried in alarm, and plunged deep into the waters of the lake.

The crow realized what had happened, and, alighting at the foot of a tall tree that grew by the water’s edge, he set the mouse down safely in a hollow in its trunk. Then, flying up to a branch that overhung the lake, he called out as loudly as he could, ‘Friend Mantharaka, come out! I am your friend, Laghupatanaka the crow. I have come to visit you after many days. So do come out and say hello!’

The turtle recognized his friend’s voice, and came swimming up to the surface of the lake. ‘Welcome, my friend, welcome!’ he cried, overjoyed. ‘Come down and let me hold you to my bosom. Please forgive me for my rudeness. I hadn’t seen you for so long that I did not recognize you and so dived into the lake.’

The crow flew down to the water’s edge, and the turtle, climbing out, clasped him in his arms. The two friends hugged each other affectionately. Meanwhile, the mouse climbed out of the hollow and sat quietly watching the crow and the turtle.

‘Friend Laghupatanaka, who is this mouse?’ asked Mantharaka. ‘You usually eat mice, so there must be a very special reason that you have brought him here upon your back.’

‘Mantharaka, this is my friend Hiranyaka,’ explained Laghupatanaka. ‘He is dearer to me than my own life. As for his virtues, I cannot even begin to list them, for they are so many. Today, though, he is sad and dejected and has left his home to come here with me.’

‘Why is he sad?’ asked Mantharaka.

‘I do not know. He did not tell me, but said that he would tell me once we reached your lake,’ replied Laghupatanaka. Turning to the mouse, he said, ‘Come, Hiranyaka, my dear friend, tell us your story, now that we are here at Mantharaka’s house.’

So Hiranyaka told them his story.

The Story of the Mouse and the Mendicant

In a kingdom in the south (*said Hiranyaka*), there lies the great city of Mahilaropya. Close to the city stands a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, and next to the temple, in a small hut, there once lived a mendicant known as Tamrachuda. Each day, Tamrachuda would go into the city for alms, and, returning, would eat only as much food as his religious vows allowed. He would put the rest of the food away in his little begging bowl, which he would hang from a peg in his hut. Every morning, he would distribute this remaining food to the workers who came to clean the temple, and their families.

One day (*continued Hiranyaka*), the other mice said to me, 'Sire, the mendicant puts away the remaining food in his bowl and hangs it up on a peg in his room only to keep that food away from us. He knows that we cannot jump so high. But nothing is impossible for you. So if you are willing, let us go to the mendicant's hut tonight and there feast to our heart's content.'

I agreed immediately, and we went, the other mice and I, to the mendicant's hut. With a single leap I reached the bowl, and threw down the food to the other mice below. After they had eaten as much as they could, I, too, ate my fill. We then returned as we had come, back to our homes. We returned the next night, and the next, and several weeks passed in this manner. The mendicant tried his best to keep the food away from me, hanging his bowl higher and higher every time. But no matter how high he hung it up, I could always reach it, and once the mendicant fell asleep, I would jump up to the bowl and we would eat our fill as before.

Then, one day, the mendicant acquired a bamboo stick from somewhere, and to make sure I could not steal his food, he would strike his begging bowl with the stick from time to time. Afraid of getting hurt, I would wait for him to fall asleep and then sneak up to the bowl, but he would wake up and begin hitting the bowl again with his stick. I would run away and hide, waiting till he fell asleep again. My nights now passed in conflict.

One day, Tamrachuda's friend, an ascetic called Brihatsphik, came to visit him. Tamrachuda received him warmly, with all the respect

due an honoured guest. As night fell, both men lay down next to each other on the mendicant's mat of rushes, and began to discuss matters of philosophy and religion. Now, Tamrachuda was somewhat distracted, worrying as he was about me and the other mice eating his food. From time to time, he would break off the conversation with his friend to strike his food bowl with the bamboo stick. Preoccupied as he was with keeping us away, he had only half an ear for his friend's conversation and gave him terse and absent-minded responses.

At last, Brihatsphik lost his patience. 'Tamrachuda,' he said, 'it has become clear to me tonight that you do not consider me to be your friend. That is why you are not paying any attention to what I am saying or talking to me with affection. I cannot stay here any more, and even though it is the middle of the night, I will leave you and find another place to shelter till dawn. After all, it has been said that we must visit the homes of only those people who greet us with warmth and affection, who ask after our well-being, and are happy to see us. We should stay only with such loving and close friends, for it is only in their homes that we can be guests without fear or formality. The host who is bored and distracted at the arrival of his guest, and who treats his visitor as disrespectfully and as casually as you are treating me—to be a guest in such a man's home is to feel as unwanted as a bull without horns! You are a fool, Tamrachuda! Your position in charge of this temple has made you so arrogant that you have even forgotten our friendship. That is why I will now leave you and go away.'

'No, no, Brihatsphik, don't say such things! I have no friend who is closer or more important to me,' pleaded Tamrachuda, greatly disturbed. 'Yes, it is true that I am distracted—it is because of this wretched mouse, who eats up the alms I have left over every day, no matter how high I hang up my begging bowl, and because of whom I have nothing to give to the workers who come to clean the temple every morning. As a result, the workers have stopped coming and the temple lies unswept. I keep striking my begging bowl with this bamboo stick, not out of disrespect for you, but to scare that mouse away—I swear there is no other cause for my lack of attention. Look, just look at that mouse! He shames even cats and monkeys in how high he jumps!'

'Do you know where he has his mouse-hole?' asked Brihatsphik.

'No, not really,' said Tamrachuda, shaking his head.

'Wherever he lives, I am sure this mouse has stashed away quite a store of food, and that is why he is so fearless and full of energy. After

all, it is well known that wealth makes a man more confident and more energetic,' declared Brihatsphik. 'Besides, there is always an explanation for everything. Believe me,

When the brahmin's wife tries to exchange
Cleaned and hulled sesame seeds
For unhulled ones
She has some good reason for it!'

'Oh, and what is her story?' asked Tamrachuda.

So Brihatsphik told him the story of the brahmin's wife and the sesame seeds.

The Story of the Brahmin's Wife and the Sesame Seeds

Once, during the rainy season (*said Brihatsphik*), I took shelter in a brahmin's house. One day, I overheard a conversation between the brahmin and his wife:

'Wife, tomorrow is an important festival, and a day when people will give alms with generosity,' said the brahmin. 'I will leave at dawn for the next village to ask for alms. In my absence, you too should give some food to a brahmin tomorrow. It is auspicious to do so.'

The brahmin's request annoyed his wife greatly. 'How can we give food to another brahmin when we don't have enough to eat ourselves?' she demanded angrily. 'A man as poor as you—are you not ashamed to make such a request of me? Ever since I have entered your house as your wife, I have had neither fine clothes nor jewellery to wear nor good food to eat. And now you ask that I give away what little we have?'

'Wife, do not speak such harsh words,' remonstrated the brahmin gently. 'It has been said that even if you have only a single morsel of food, share half of it with someone needy. After all, who in this world has ever had as much wealth as they want? No matter how little the quantity, we must give whatever we can.

'A rich man may give vast amounts of wealth as alms, but the reward that he reaps as a result is the same that a poor man gets for giving the little bit that he can afford. A poor man who gives freely of what he has is respected by the world, while a rich man who gives nothing is derided by everyone. A well that provides sweet water to drink gives more pleasure than the vast ocean with its salty water. So poor though we might be, we must give to others according to our ability.

'And though I do not say that we must not desire anything for ourselves, we must not be excessively greedy. For it is well known that the jackal was killed because he tried to hoard what he had.'

'Oh really? And how did that happen?' asked his wife.

So the brahmin told her the story of the huntsman, the boar and the

jackal.

The Story of the Huntsman, the Boar and the Jackal

Once, in a certain forest far away, a huntsman in search of game suddenly saw a huge wild boar amidst the trees. The boar was as enormous as a mountain and as black as night, with tusks that curved like the crescent moon and were as bright. Spying the boar, the huntsman immediately fitted an arrow to his bow and, taking aim, let fly.

The arrow pierced the boar's rough skin so that the boar, mad with pain, charged the huntsman and, goring him with his sharp tusks, killed him. Then, mortally wounded by the arrow, the boar too died.

A short while later, a hungry jackal in search of food came upon the huntsman and the boar lying dead next to each other. 'Oh my, what a feast!' he exclaimed in delight. 'Here lie not one but two delicious corpses. This food will last me a long time. I must be careful how I eat it.' He walked around the bodies, thinking how best to conserve the food he had found so unexpectedly. 'First, I will eat the bowstring,' he said to himself. 'After all, I must be frugal and savour this feast slowly. There is no point in rushing to eat up all this meat!'

And having so decided, the jackal began to gnaw upon the taut string of the bow. A few seconds later, the bowstring snapped, and the bow, thus suddenly released, whipped back and pierced the jackal through the roof of his mouth. Of course, the jackal died.

'And so I say,' concluded the brahmin, 'let us not be greedy, but give what we can to others.'

'Well, let me see what I can spare,' said his wife after listening to the story. 'I do have some sesame seeds put away. Maybe I can clean them and hull them and pound them into little cakes for a brahmin.' And off she went to her kitchen to clean and soak the sesame. The brahmin, satisfied, left for the next village.

The brahmin's wife did as she had promised. She soaked the sesame seeds in hot water, cleaned them and hulled them, and then, spreading them out to dry in the sun, busied herself with her chores.

As the seeds lay drying in the sun, a dog came wandering by and, liking the look of the seeds, raised its leg and urinated upon them. The brahmin's wife saw the dog but could not stop it in time. 'Oh, what a waste,' she lamented. 'Now what shall I do?'

After thinking a while, she gathered up the sesame seeds and tied them in a little bundle. 'I will go to my neighbour and ask her to take my cleaned and hulled seeds in exchange for unhulled ones,' she said to herself. 'I am sure she will not refuse such an exchange.'

So, off she went to her neighbour's house with her bundle of seeds, and knocking upon her door, offered the hulled seeds in exchange for unhulled ones. The neighbour was delighted at the offer, and was about to make the exchange when her son, who had overheard the brahmin's wife, came into the room. 'Mother, stop, do not accept her offer,' he said.

'Why not?' asked his mother. 'It is an excellent offer, hulled seeds in exchange for unhulled ones!'

'Mother, there must be a good reason why she is willing to make this exchange. I am sure there is something wrong with her seeds, for otherwise why would she give you cleaned seeds for unhulled ones? Do not accept her offer!'

At this the neighbour turned away from the brahmin's wife and refused her offer.

'And so you see,' concluded Brihatsphik, 'there is always a reason behind everything: I am sure that just as the dog was the reason behind the brahmin's wife's offer, a hidden store of food is the reason behind this mouse's ability to jump. Now tell me, do you know the path this mouse takes to come here?'

'Yes, I do, for I have often seen him enter and leave my hut. He never comes alone but always with his clan of followers, all of whom run about here and there as they come and go.'

'And do you have something we can dig with?'

'Yes, here you are, I have this pickaxe,' said Tamrachuda, pulling out a heavy iron pickaxe and handing it to his friend.

'Excellent,' approved Brihatsphik. 'Now we must rise early tomorrow morning, and before anyone or anything else wipes them out, we must follow the tracks made by the mouse to his mouse-hole.'

When I heard this (*continued Hiranyaka*), I was terrified. This Brihatsphik was a cunning fellow. He had guessed, quite correctly, that I had a store of food buried under my home, and I was certain that he would be able to follow my tracks and find my hole. I was sure

that I was about to die.

That night, in an attempt to throw off Brihatsphik from our trail, I abandoned our usual route and led my followers back by a different path. All might have been well, but suddenly, looming up in our way, stood a huge cat. The cat pounced upon us and caught and killed several of my companions. Several others were injured. The ground was red with our blood. Those of us who could get away from the cat did so and ran back to their holes. My companions cursed me and blamed me for leading them to the cat. I, overwhelmed with grief, also hid away somewhere.

A little later, the two men arrived, following our tracks. They followed the trails of blood to our mouse-holes, and digging around our homes, they found my precious hoard of food. They dug this up and carried it back with them to Tamrachuda's hut. When I saw that I had been robbed of all my wealth, I was greatly troubled. 'What shall I do? Where shall I go?' I asked myself in despair. Somehow the day passed and soon it was evening.

That night, I led my remaining companions back to Tamrachuda's hut. The mendicant heard us go in, and as before, began to beat his bamboo stick upon his begging bowl.

'Friend, can you not sleep in peace even now?' asked Brihatsphik.

'Those mice have returned,' cried Tamrachuda, 'and that clever one will be at my food again. That is why I am beating upon the bowl.'

'Don't worry any more,' laughed Brihatsphik. 'We have taken away his hoard, so he will have no energy to jump as high as before. After all, a man who is full of energy, who overcomes obstacles with confidence, and is haughty and arrogant and mocks others, is who he is because of the power he derives from his wealth.'

Hearing his words (*said Hiranyaka*), I was so angry that I gathered all my energy and jumped as high as I could towards the begging bowl. But that night I could not reach it, and fell upon the floor with a splat.

Seeing my plight, my enemy, Brihatsphik, laughed and said to the mendicant, 'Look at that mouse now, Tamrachuda. Have you seen a more pitiable sight? Truly it is said that it is wealth that sets a man apart; even the best of men, once he loses his wealth, becomes as ordinary as the others. A man without wealth is like a snake without poison, harmless and powerless. And so it has been with this mouse. So sleep in peace tonight, my friend. This mouse can longer cause you any harm.'

Sad and unhappy, I returned to my mouse-hole. Brihatsphik was

right—without my store of food, I was powerless. I could no longer jump, and my friends and followers no longer wanted to have anything to do with me. ‘He cannot provide for us any more,’ they said. ‘To follow him is to invite death, for the good-for-nothing fellow can lead us only to the cat,’ they mocked. Truly, a rich man who loses his wealth suffers more than a man who never had any.

Very soon, my followers chose another leader, and now I was completely on my own. No one came to visit me, and no one spoke to me. Instead, my friends, who had always looked up to me before, now began to openly laugh at me. I had noticed, on my last visit, that the mendicant had stuffed my precious store of food into a bag, and was using it as a pillow. At last, unable to deal with the mockery of my erstwhile friends and the loneliness that poverty had imposed upon me, I decided to return to the mendicant’s hut and steal back my hoard of food. Even if I were to die in the attempt, that dying would be better than the life I now led.

That night, I returned to the mendicant’s hut. The man lay fast asleep with my hoard under his head. I began to gnaw at the bag as quietly as I could, but before I could make a hole in it, the fellow woke up and, grabbing his bamboo stick, began to beat me with it. My time to die had not yet come, so I somehow managed to escape with my life. Perhaps I was not destined to recover my store of food, for it has been said and truly so that

We get that which we are meant to get
Even the gods cannot change that
And so, I do not despair
Nor am I surprised at loss or gain
That which is mine will be mine
No other can take it away.

Reflecting upon this, I stopped worrying about recovering my store of food and returned home. Laghupatanaka arrived at my doorstep that very instant, and told me that he was going away. Given my distress at the events that had taken place, I decided to join him. And so here I am.

‘And you are very welcome,’ said Mantharaka, graciously. ‘Hiranyaka,’ he continued, ‘this crow, Laghupatanaka, is a true friend. He was hungry and starving, and you are his natural prey. He could have eaten you; instead, he carried you on his back and brought you safely

all the way here. A friend who remains a friend even in times of trouble is a true friend indeed. We must always treasure such friends, for they are rare and hard to find. You are fortunate to have found a friend as good and true as Laghupatanaka.

'So stay here with me, both of you, on the shores of this lake, and consider it your home. Hiranyaka, do not worry any more about the loss of your hoard. Riches come and riches go, and may be enjoyed only for a short time. They are as transient as the clouds that hide the sun for a while, giving us temporary relief from its fierce rays. A wise man uses his wits to acquire wealth, but he is never miserly about spending it, because he knows that if destiny so decrees, he may lose it all one day. Just as Somilaka the weaver lost all his wealth the moment he entered the forest.'

'Oh, and how did that happen?' asked the crow and the mouse.

So Mantharaka told them the story of the unfortunate weaver.

The Story of the Unfortunate Weaver

In a city far away, there lived a weaver called Somilaka. He was a gifted craftsman, weaving beautifully patterned silk in rich hues of red and purple and green and gold. The cloth he wove was so gorgeous and so expensive that only the king and the noblemen of his court could afford it.

Despite the fine and expensive silks he wove, Somilaka was a poor man, barely earning enough to feed and clothe himself and his family. The other, less talented weavers in the town, who wove only heavy, coarse cloth, were better off than him—a state of affairs that Somilaka found intolerable.

One day, unable to bear it any more, he said to his wife, 'Beloved, see how wealthy these other weavers have grown. They have no skill, their cloth is rough and without beauty, yet they have more money than I do. My work is not valued in this town. If I want to make my fortune, I must leave this place and go somewhere far away.'

'Husband, this is nonsense!' protested his wife. 'It is not necessary to go away to strange and foreign places to earn your fortune! A man may run away to the clouds or hide himself in hell or travel to the other end of the world, but if he is not destined to be wealthy, he will not be, no matter where he goes. So I would say, remain here, and continue to weave your cloth as you have always done.'

'Beloved, you are wrong,' said the weaver. 'Destiny alone will not give us wealth, we must make some effort and do what needs to be done to earn. Just as we need both hands to clap, we need both destiny and right effort to get rich. Even if the most sumptuous meal is set before us, it does not reach our mouths unless we make the effort to pick up the morsels and put them in our mouths! Only a combination of hard work and talent gives wealth. To rely solely on destiny is foolish, for only toil and industry bring work to fruition; only hard work leads us to the fulfilment of our dreams! So I will not rely on fate, but I will do as I have decided—I will travel to foreign lands and there, with hard and honest work, I will make my fortune.'

The weaver left his home and travelled till he reached the faraway city of Bardhaman. There, he lived and worked for three years, at the

end of which he had earned and saved up 300 gold coins. He then decided to return home, taking his wealth with him.

In his path lay a dense forest that he had to cross to reach home. He was only halfway through the forest when the sun set. The weaver, afraid of running into thieves or wild animals in the dark, climbed a large banyan tree nearby and, settling himself comfortably upon a sturdy branch, fell fast asleep.

As he slept, he had a fearsome dream. In his dream, two huge men stood under his tree and argued. Said the first, 'Hey Karta, you are well aware that he is not destined to have more than he needs to clothe and feed himself and his family! So why then have you given Somilaka 300 gold coins?'

'It is my duty, O Karman, to reward hard-working people,' replied the second. 'Now, whether he is able to enjoy his hard-earned wealth or not is in your hands.'

The weaver awoke with a start and untied the little bundle at his waist in which he was carrying his gold. The bundle was empty, the gold coins gone. 'How did this happen?' he exclaimed. 'My money has vanished—all those coins I had worked so hard to earn! How can I go home empty-handed? What will I tell my wife and my friends?'

Sadly, Somilaka turned away from home and went back to the city of Bardhaman. There, he worked even harder than before, and in a single year had amassed 500 gold coins. Tying up his wealth securely in a bundle at his waist, he set off for home once more. And once again, as he walked through the forest, the sun set just as he neared that same banyan tree.

This time Somilaka did not stop. Though it was pitch dark and he was tired, he did not stop to rest. Not willing to risk losing his money again, and eager to reach home, he kept walking briskly through the forest. Suddenly he saw, walking towards him, the same two terrifying men he had seen before in his dream. He could hear their conversation quite clearly.

Said one to the other, 'Hey Karta, have you given this weaver 500 gold coins? Why can you not understand that he is not destined to earn more than what will fulfil his basic needs?'

Replied the other, 'You know that I reward the industrious, O Karman. It is my job to do so. But whether they are able to enjoy the fruits of their hard work is in your hands. So why do you berate me needlessly?'

Alarmed by their talk, Somilaka undid the little bundle in which he carried his wealth and found the bundle quite empty. His 500 gold

coins had vanished as before. He looked at his empty bundle in despair. ‘What is the point of living if I can never keep the wealth I earn?’ he thought. ‘I might as well kill myself right now.’ And making a rope from some *kusha* grass, he decided to hang himself from a branch of the banyan tree.

Just as he was preparing to die, a voice from the sky called his name. ‘Somilaka!’ boomed the voice. ‘Do not kill yourself. There is no need for you to show this false courage. It is I, Destiny, who has taken away your gold. It is not decreed that you should have more wealth than you need to feed and clothe yourself and your family. But seeing your state, I will take pity on you and grant you one boon. So ask of me anything that you wish.’

‘In that case,’ replied Somilaka, ‘I ask you to give me uncountable riches.’

The voice replied, ‘What will you do with that wealth? You have no use for it. It will lie in your home, of no use to anyone. What is the point of acquiring wealth that does not benefit others?’

‘Even if I have no use for it, that wealth is still mine and I should get it,’ replied Somilaka. ‘After all, a man who has wealth is respected and revered by everyone, even if he is a miser or lacking in other graces.’

‘If that is how you feel,’ said the voice, ‘then return to the city of Bardhaman. There live two merchants—Guptadhana the miser and Upabhuktadhana the profligate. Observe how they behave and then tell me which one you would rather be like—would you rather be Guptadhana, who has a lot of money but who cannot enjoy it because he does not spend it, or would you rather be Upabhuktadhana, who has no savings because he enjoys spending and spends all he has. I will make you like the one you prefer.’ So saying, the voice from the sky fell silent.

Once more Somilaka turned away from home and went back to the city of Bardhaman. He reached the city at sundown, tired and hungry, and found his way to Guptadhana’s house, where he asked shelter for the night. Guptadhana, together with his wife and his children, scolded and reviled him. But Somilaka, mindful of what the voice had asked him to do, ignored the merchant’s cursing and remained as a guest in his house. When it was time for the evening meal, Guptadhana and his wife rudely served him a measly meal and left him alone to eat it.

After his meal, Somilaka fell asleep, and as he slept, he heard the two fearsome men again. Said one, ‘Hey Karta, why did you make

Guptadhana take in Somilaka for the night and feed him? Why did you make him spend his money? Do you not know that Guptadhana is destined to have money but not spend it? Why did you make him give so much to the weaver?'

Replied the other, 'What could I do, O Karman? It is my job to assign who gives and who gets. The final outcome of that giving and getting is up to you, so why do you blame me?'

The next morning, when Somilaka woke up, he found that Guptadhana had a stomach ache and could not eat all day. (Thus, he saved that day what he had spent on Somilaka the day before.)

Then Somilaka found his way to Upabhuktadhana's house. There he was welcomed with great warmth, given a comfortable room to stay in and new clothes to wear, and when it was time to eat, he was served a large and sumptuous meal. That night, as he slept on his comfortable bed in Upabhuktadhana's house, he heard the same two men talking.

Said one, 'Hey Karta, now see what you have done! You know how lavishly Upabhuktadhana spends! He took credit from the grocer to entertain Somilaka. He has no savings, for that is his destiny. So now how will he ever pay back the grocer's debt?'

'What could I do, O Karman?' replied the other. 'It is my job to assign who gives and who gets. The final outcome of that giving and getting is up to you, so why do you blame me?'

The next morning, when Somilaka woke up, he saw a royal messenger approach Upabhuktadhana's house. The messenger had come laden with gold and precious stones from the treasury, as a gift from the king to the merchant. (And so he had enough to pay back his debt to the grocer.)

Seeing this, Somilaka said to himself, 'This Upabhuktadhana is not a rich man, for he spends all he has. But he is a kind and pleasant person. Now Guptadhana, he is rich man, but he is such a miser, and so mean and nasty! It is definitely better to be like Upabhuktadhana!'

Somilaka then returned to the banyan tree in the forest and cried out, 'Destiny, make me like Upabhuktadhana who, though not a rich man, enjoys all he has!' His wish was granted, and Somilaka went back home to his wife and his friends, a happy and contented man. He no longer craved for great wealth, but learnt to enjoy what he had.

'And so, Hiranyaka,' concluded Mantharaka, 'do not ever worry over matters of money. A man should use money to provide for his needs and that of his family, and to help others. It should never be hoarded.

A rich man who has money but does not spend it is no different from a man who has nothing. Rather than wealth, it is contentment that we should seek, for that alone will bring joy. So, friend Hiranyaka, forget your sorrows, and come and live with us in peace in your new home.'

Laghupatanaka, who had been listening carefully all this while, was delighted at Mantharaka's kind words. 'You have made me the happiest crow in the land,' he said, thanking Mantharaka, 'for you have welcomed my friend Hiranyaka, and by giving him such good advice, lifted the load of despair from his heart.' Turning to the mouse he continued, 'Hiranyaka, you are now amongst friends, and there is nothing better in life than the company of good friends. So throw away your grief, and live life to its fullest.'

As the three friends stood talking by the shores of the lake, a deer called Chitranga came running by and stood trembling in the shallows of the lake. He was being chased by a hunter, and had somehow escaped with his life. Alarmed by the deer, the crow flew up into the branches of a tree, the mouse hid himself in the reeds growing on the shore, and the turtle slipped into the water.

After a while, the crow, who had been watching the deer, called out to the turtle, 'Mantharaka, come out of the water. The deer seems to be thirsty, that is all. There is no cause for alarm.'

'No, no, Laghupatanaka,' replied Mantharaka. 'I don't think the deer has come here to quench his thirst. He is panting and afraid. I think he is being chased by huntsmen. Please fly out and survey the forest and tell me if you can see any around.'

The crow flew off to do as the turtle asked. Meanwhile, the deer, who had heard the conversation between the two friends, spoke up. 'Friend Mantharaka,' he said, 'you have guessed the cause of my alarm correctly. My companions and I were being chased and harried all day by a party of huntsmen. Somehow I managed to give them the slip and come here. I am sure that they must have killed the rest of my herd. I seek your protection. Please tell me quickly a place where I may hide should the huntsmen follow me here.'

'Friend Chitranga,' replied Mantharaka, 'there are only two ways to save yourself from your enemy—you can fight, or you can run. I would suggest that you run into that thicket there and hide yourself before your pursuers get here.'

The deer did as the turtle suggested, and ran with graceful leaps and bounds into the nearby thicket. Meanwhile, the crow who had flown off to survey the forest, returned and, perching himself upon a tree branch, said, 'Mantharaka, those huntsmen have gone home, carrying

with them the carcasses of the many animals they killed today. We have nothing to fear from them just now.' Calling to the deer, he added, 'Chitranga, you may come out of your hiding place now. The men have gone. Do not be afraid any more.'

At this the turtle swam out of the lake, the mouse crept out of his hidey-hole amongst the reeds and the deer ran out of the thicket. The crow flew down from his branch to join them. Mantharaka welcomed the newcomer courteously, and invited him to drink freely from the lake and rest there as long as he wished.

'I like these creatures,' thought the deer to himself. 'I am not afraid of them, for the turtle lives in the water, while the crow and the mouse feed only on carrion.' Aloud, he thanked the turtle for his kindness and said, 'I came here exhausted and afraid, but found such kind hosts in all of you. Now, if you will allow me, I would like to stay here and be your friend.'

'Hmm, that may not be wise,' said Mantharaka. 'You see, the three of us are small and weak, while you are big and strong. We may not be of much use to you in times of trouble. It is always better to make friends with those who can help you when you need it.'

'You are being too modest,' protested the deer. 'I do not care if you are small and I am large. It is said and truly so

Make friends with the big
Make friends with the small
The elephants, caught in a trap in the forest
Were by mice released.'

'Oh, and how was that?' asked the turtle, the crow and the mouse.

So the deer told them the story of the elephants and the mice.

The Story of the Elephants and the Mice

Once upon a time, in a ruined city in a forest, lived a large colony of mice. The mice had lived there for generations. They had plenty of food in the forest, and unmolested by man or beast, they lived there in peace and harmony.

One day, a herd of elephants came into the forest, searching for a lake or pond wherein to slake their thirst. The elephants, led by their king, a mighty bull elephant as tall as a mountain, passed through the ruined city where the mice had made their home. Now, the elephants were so big that they did not even notice the little mice, and as they walked through their city, they trampled underfoot hundreds of mice, killing them instantly.

The mice who managed to escape the elephants called an emergency meeting. 'If these elephants come through our town one more time, they will kill the rest of us,' they cried in despair. 'We must find a way to stop them.' After much thinking, the mice decided to send a delegation to the elephants.

The mice delegation scurried to the lake where the herd of elephants stood drinking and playing in the water, and going up to the king they said, 'Sire, not far from here lies the ruined city which is our home. This morning, as you passed through it on your way to this lake, you and your elephants trampled and killed hundreds of our people. We therefore beg you to find another way to the lake, for if you pass by even once more through our town, you will kill us all.'

The king of the elephants agreed at once to their request. 'So be it,' he said. 'I will make sure we find another way to and from the lake. From now on no elephant shall pass through your town.'

The mice thanked him and scampered away, greatly relieved.

A few months later, the very same herd of elephants was trapped and captured by the local king's men. The elephants were bound and tied with strong ropes to the trunks of stout trees and left there till their spirit should break. 'What shall I do? How shall I free my people?' wondered the king of the elephants, a prisoner like the rest of his herd.

Now, the news of the elephants' capture, which spread like wildfire

through the forest, soon reached the colony of mice. ‘We must save our friends,’ cried the mice, and hurried through the forest to where the elephants still stood, tied to the trees. The mice set to work at once, and, within a few hours, gnawed through the ropes that bound the elephants and set them all free. The grateful elephants thanked the mice and disappeared into the forest, safe from the traps of the hunters.

‘And so,’ concluded Chitranga the deer, ‘we must make friends with everyone, big or small, strong or weak.’

‘Well, if that is so, then let it be as you desire,’ said Mantharaka. ‘From now on, your home is here with us. Stay here in peace and safety, and throw away all your worries.’

From that moment on, the crow, the mouse, the turtle and the deer became firm friends. They would gather together on the same spot by the lake every afternoon and spend their time in friendly and cheerful conversation.

One afternoon, Chitranga did not arrive for their daily gathering. Laghupatanaka, Hiranyaka and Mantharaka waited a while, and then, when the deer still did not appear, they grew concerned. ‘What could have happened to him? Could he have been eaten by a lion? Or caught in a forest fire? Or, lured by fresh, green grass, fallen into a hunter’s trap?’ they worried.

It is true that if someone we love is late or missing, we always worry that the worst may have happened to them. It is natural to worry about loved ones even if they are late coming into the house from the garden, so what could be said about the state of mind of the three friends as they waited for the deer to return from the forest?

Mantharaka said to the crow, ‘Friend Laghupatanaka, neither Hiranyaka nor I will be any good in searching for Chitranga. We are too small and too slow. But you can fly far and swiftly over the trees. So please go and search for our friend. Let us hope that you find him alive and well.’

Laghupatanaka did as the turtle suggested and flew off in search of their friend. He had flown only a short distance when, by the side of a small pond, he saw Chitranga. The deer had been caught in a hunter’s net, and lay helpless and hopelessly entangled.

‘Friend! How did you get caught in this way?’ called Laghupatanaka, deeply concerned.

Seeing his friend the crow, Chitranga’s eyes filled with tears. ‘Friend,’ he said, I am certain that my final hour has come. I am glad

that you are here with me at this moment. It is truly said that in such situations, a friend by one's side is the greatest blessing. If I die, then I will die happy, knowing you were with me. If, in our time together, I have ever on purpose or inadvertently hurt or offended you, then please forgive me.'

'Chitranga, do not give in to despair,' replied Laghupatanaka. 'Now that we have found you, we will find a way to rescue you. I will return at once with Hiranyaka, and he will cut through the meshes that bind you in no time. In times of trouble, strong men do not panic in this way.'

Reassuring Chitranga and giving him courage, Laghupatanaka flew back to Mantharaka and Hiranyaka. After explaining the situation to them, he took Hiranyaka upon his back and flew back to Chitranga. The deer greeted the mouse with relief. 'It is true that we must make friends with good and generous people,' he declared. 'Friends help us through our times of trouble; without friends, it is impossible to overcome the difficulties that life throws our way.'

'Chitranga, you are so wise and so learned—how then did you fall into this trap?' asked the mouse sorrowfully.

'Friend, there is no time for such useless discussion,' said Chitranga. 'That evil hunter will be back soon to check his trap. Please gnaw through my bonds before he returns.'

'Don't be afraid any more,' laughed Hiranyaka, setting to work on Chitranga's bonds. 'But seeing your condition, I am beginning to lose my respect for learning and education. So do answer my question—how did one as learned as you fall into this trap?'

'Friend,' replied Chitranga sadly, 'when fate is against you, no amount of learning or wisdom can save you.'

Meanwhile, Laghupatanaka, who was sitting high up in a tree keeping watch, saw Mantharaka the turtle crawling slowly towards them through the underbrush. 'Oh, no! This is not good,' he exclaimed.

'Why, is the hunter on his way here?' asked Hiranyaka, alarmed.

'No, not the hunter, but I can see Mantharaka making his way here. He has been very unwise to follow us. If the hunter comes back now, Mantharaka could get killed. I can soar into the sky and escape, you can hide in a hole in the ground, and with his bonds cut, even Chitranga can run away. But Mantharaka, who is so swift in the water, can barely move on land. How will he save himself?'

Just then Mantharaka arrived on the scene. 'Friend, you should not have come,' said Hiranyaka to him. 'It would be best that you return

before the hunter should get here.'

'What could I do? How could I stay back, knowing that my friend was in trouble?' replied Mantharaka. 'It was intolerable, not knowing what was going on. And so I came here.'

The distant twang of a bowstring broke into their conversation. The mouse quickly gnawed through the deer's remaining bonds and set him free. The deer stood up and ran away as fast as he could to hide himself in the underbrush, while the crow flew up into a tree, and the mouse scurried into a nearby mouse-hole.

The hunter saw that the deer had escaped, and was deeply vexed and gave up all hope of catching anything that day. He turned away and began walking homewards when suddenly he spied the turtle crawling slowly away. Ah, here was a meal for his children, he thought. Delightedly, he jumped upon the turtle and grabbed him, and tying his forelegs together with some straw, he hung him upon the end of his bow and set off jauntily towards home. 'The deer got away, but the flesh of this turtle will do nicely instead,' he thought happily.

Seeing the hunter walking away with Mantharaka, Hiranyaka the mouse began to wail and weep. 'Oh, what a calamity this is!' he lamented. 'Will my troubles never end? First my treasure gets stolen, I become an outcast amongst my own people, and as if that wasn't enough, I lose my friend. Yes, I have other friends, but a friend like Mantharaka is impossible to find! With Mantharaka gone, who will help me in my times of trouble? Who will give me sage advice? Oh Mantharaka, Mantharaka!'

As Hiranyaka wailed and wept, he was joined by Laghupatanaka and Chitranga, both of whom were in tears at Mantharaka's capture. 'Friends, what is the point of weeping?' said Hiranyaka after a while. 'Let us not waste any more time in fruitless tears. Instead, let us put our heads together and think how we can rescue Mantharaka. We must hurry, for if we lose sight of the hunter, we will not be able to find Mantharaka in time to save him.'

'I have a plan,' said Laghupatanaka the crow. 'Both of you must do exactly as I say. First, you, Chitranga, must lie down by a pond in the hunter's path as though dead. I will perch myself upon you and pretend to peck out your eyes, thus convincing the hunter that you are, indeed, dead. He will, in his excitement, put down Mantharaka and come towards us, eager for your flesh. When he does that, you, Hiranyaka, must gnaw through Mantharaka's bonds and hurry him into the pond before the hunter can turn back.'

The mouse and the deer approved of the crow's plan, and the three

friends set off to rescue the turtle. They did exactly as the crow had suggested. Finding a pond that lay in the hunter's path, the deer lay down beside it, pretending to be dead. The crow perched himself upon his head and pretended to peck at his eyes. The hunter, coming upon this scene, laid down the turtle and ran towards the dead deer, a far bigger catch for him than a turtle. Hiranyaka gnawed through the string binding Mantharaka's legs in an instant, and as the turtle hurried into the pond and swam away, he too, dived into a nearby hole for safety. Seeing that Mantharaka was safely away, Chitranga sprang up and ran away as fast as he could through the trees where the hunter could not follow him, while Laghupatanaka soared up into the sky.

The bewildered hunter stared at the deer vanishing through the trees, and, with a sigh, turned back to the turtle, only to find that he had vanished too! He held his head in despair and, lamenting and cursing fate, turned towards home.

The four friends watched the hunter leave, and once he was safely out of the forest, they came out of hiding, and laughing and crying, embraced each other. Happily, they returned to the shores of their lake, where they continued to live in peace and safety till the end of their days, meeting every afternoon as they had always done, for a story and some conversation and the pleasure of each other's company.

'The lesson of this story,' said Vishnusharma to the princes, 'is that those who make friends with others, and who nurture their friendships and look after them, are never alone. With their friends by their side, they can face any trouble, overcome any enemy and never have to suffer humiliation or defeat.'
'And with this, I end the second part of your lessons,' he concluded.

Part 3

Of Crows and Owls

Vishnusharma said to the three princes, 'I now come to the third part of your lessons, which tells of deceit and friendship, war and peace. Never trust someone who once used to be your enemy but now suddenly becomes your friend. Look at the cave once inhabited by owls that was set on fire by the crow professing friendship, though he had once been their enemy. Now listen to what happened.'

The Story of the Crows and the Owls

It has been heard that in a kingdom in the south, there lies the fair city of Mahilaropya. Not far from the city, there once stood a vast and spreading banyan tree, with innumerable branches and dense, green leaves. Upon that tree lived Meghavarna, king of the crows, and his hundreds of subjects. Close by, in a mountain cave, lived Arimardana, king of the owls, and his subjects.

The crows and the owls were old enemies, and there was little love lost between the two colonies of birds. Every night, seeking revenge for old hurts, Arimardana the owl would circle the crows' banyan tree, and kill any crow that crossed his path. He would then fly away to the safety of his cave. Over time, Arimardana killed a great number of crows in this way.

Such happenings are inevitable in the world, for it is said that those who, out of laziness or indifference, ignore an enemy or a disease and take no steps to destroy one or stop the other, will in time be overcome and destroyed by them.

One day, Meghavarna called a meeting of his ministers and said, 'Our enemy is persevering and determined. He is clever too and knows how to use time and circumstances to his advantage. He attacks only at night, knowing that we cannot see in the dark and are therefore powerless to defend ourselves. We are as helpless during the day, for, though we can see, we do not know where he and his subjects live. His attacks grow more ferocious every night. What shall we do? Should we make peace? Launch an attack? Retreat? Or make a stand? Should we ask our allies for help? Or should we, through intrigue and deceit, cause discord amongst his followers? These, as you know, are the six ways to tackle an enemy. Tell me, which one should we adopt?'

The ministers nodded and said, 'Sire, it is good and right that you have asked us our opinion, for only when the king asks can a minister say what he really thinks. And having once asked his opinion, the king must give his minister a hearing, even if what the minister says is harsh or unpleasant. Given the urgency of the situation, it is best that each of us states his opinion at once so that you can decide what to

do.'

'Very well,' agreed the king, and turned to the first minister, who was called Ujjivi.

Ujjivi cleared his throat and said, 'Sire, it is not wise to wage war against an enemy stronger than ourselves. Arimardana the owl is not only powerful, he is also clever and knows the right moment to attack us. It is unlikely that we will be able to defeat him. So I recommend that we make peace with him and his people.'

Then Meghavarna turned to the second minister, who was called Sanjivi, and asked, 'What do you think, my friend? What should we do?'

'Sire, Ujjivi's counsel that we make peace with our enemy, I do not like,' replied Sanjivi. 'Arimardana the owl is cruel and unscrupulous, and cannot be trusted to honour any treaty we may make with him. Peace with him will never last. There is no point in proposing peace to an enemy who is without honour and has no respect for truth or justice. No matter how binding the treaty, such a one will always break it. So, I recommend that we declare war on Arimardana and his people and attack them.'

The king then turned to the third minister, who was called Anujivi. 'And what do you say, my friend?' he asked.

'Sire,' said Anujivi, 'our enemy is stronger than we are, so we cannot fight him. He is also unscrupulous and without honour, so we cannot make peace with him. Therefore, in my opinion, we should withdraw from this conflict and move away somewhere else.'

The king looked at the fourth minister, who was called Prajivi. 'What is your advice?' he asked.

'Sire,' replied Prajivi, 'I think that these three suggestions of peace, attack and retreat are useless. In my opinion, we must stay where we are and make a stand against the enemy. One is always stronger in one's own environment. As they say, a crocodile can kill an elephant in the water, but cannot fight even a dog on land. A single archer, well-positioned, can kill a hundred soldiers. If, intimidated by the owls, we flee our home, we will never be able to return, never see our beloved tree again. So, I would say, our best course of action is to stay where we are and stand firm against the owls.'

'Hmm,' said the king, considering. Then, turning to the fifth minister, who was called Chiranjivi, he asked, 'And what, my friend, do you think is our best course of action?'

'Sire,' said Chiranjivi, 'to me it seems that our best course of action would be to seek the help of our friends and allies. As it has been said,

a man may be strong and powerful, but if he doesn't have friends, what can he do? See how even a blazing fire dies down in the absence of a wind to fan its flames. So I say that we ask our friends for help.'

Meghavarna now turned to the oldest of his counsellors, a crow named Sthirajivi. The old minister was wise and experienced, and learned in all matters of statecraft. He had also served the king's father long and well, and Meghavarna trusted his judgement in all matters. 'Sir,' he respectfully addressed the old minister, 'you have heard the opinions of the others. Each minister has put forward his point of view. Now please advise me—which one is the right course of action for me to follow?'

'My son,' replied the old crow, 'your ministers have advised you in accordance with all the rules of statecraft. Each of their solutions will work well, but under different circumstances. In our present situation, the only course of action that will give you the desired result is deceit. Intrigue is the only effective weapon against a strong enemy. So you must plot and scheme, and eliminate your enemy through duplicity and double-dealing. Discover his weaknesses, and then destroy him.'

'How can I discover his weaknesses,' protested the king, 'when I do not even know where he lives?'

'Leave that to me, my son. I will send out my spies and secret agents and through them discover not only where he lives but all his flaws and weaknesses,' answered Sthirajivi. 'Animals discover the world through their sense of smell, scholars through their books, ordinary men with their two eyes, and kings through their spies. The king who, through his spies and secret agents, keeps an eye on his enemies as well as his allies, is never caught unawares.'

'First tell me, revered sir,' said Meghavarna, 'what is the reason for this deadly enmity between the crows and owls?'

In reply, Sthirajivi related the story of how the birds picked a king.

The Story of How the Birds Chose a King

Once upon a time, the birds of the world—including the swan, the parrot, the stork, the koel, the cuckoo, the pigeon, the owl, the rooster, the partridge, and every other kind of bird there is—gathered together in a great assembly. They were angry and distressed with their king, the eagle Garuda, who, as we all know, is a devotee of Lord Vishnu.

'Our king,' said the swan, 'is so engrossed in the service of Lord Vishnu that he has no time to think about us. He is too busy flying Lord Vishnu here and there around the universe to worry about us. When we get caught in the hunter's net, or become the target of his arrows, our king is never there to help us. Though there is no doubt that he is the strongest and wisest of all the birds, he is of no use as a king.'

'A people without a king who cares for them are like a rudderless boat adrift upon the sea—they will ultimately perish, just as the boat will ultimately sink under the waves and be destroyed!' said the parrot.

'A good king,' continued the peacock, 'is one to whom we can turn in times of trouble, who will listen to our woes, and keep us safe from our enemies!'

'We need a new king, one who will be there for us, not absent on some other business!' twittered all the other birds in agreement. 'Let us choose a new king for ourselves,' they declared.

Looking around for a likely candidate, the birds noticed the owl, who had been sitting calmly and quite unruffled through all the excited twittering and chirping. His grave and gracious demeanour impressed them deeply. 'The owl shall be our new king,' cried all the birds together. 'Let us anoint him and crown him our ruler at once!' And the birds rushed here and there to make arrangements for his coronation.

Soon, everything was ready. A great throne of shining gold had been set up under a canopy of wild flowers, herbs and fragrant blossoms strewn upon the ground, and pitchers of holy water stood up all around. In the centre had been lit the sacred fire, and priests had

already begun to chant the mantras for the well-being of the king. As dusk began to fall, rows of earthenware lamps were lit. The owl now took his place upon the throne of gold, and the ceremonies to crown him king were about to begin.

Just then, who should come flying by but the crow. He had missed the news of the great assembly, and seeing the birds gathered together in such a large crowd, he decided to investigate. 'What's going on? What festivities am I missing? What great celebration is this?' he cawed cheerfully.

When the other birds saw the crow, they were delighted. 'The crow is the cleverest and most intelligent of all birds,' they said to each other. 'We must ask him what he thinks of our choice of king!' And turning to the crow they said, 'You have come at a very opportune moment! We have chosen the owl to be our new king and are making ready to crown him. We would be honoured to hear your opinion on the matter.'

The crow laughed and said, 'I cannot approve of your choice! Why have you chosen the owl—who is blind by day and so ungainly and dreadful to look at? You have the majestic peacock, the graceful swan, the sweet-voiced koel, the clever parrot, the dependable duck, the regal sarus crane . . . you could have chosen any one of them to be king instead. The owl is a hunter, a fierce, ferocious and cruel bird. His speech is harsh, his demeanour unpleasant. What good fortune do you expect by choosing such a disagreeable bird to be your king?

'Besides, you already have the divine eagle Garuda for your king. Why then choose someone as devoid of good qualities as the owl for your king? Even if the owl had been possessed of every virtue, I see no sense in choosing another king. Garuda is so mighty that his name alone is enough to frighten away your enemies. It has been said, and truly so

The mere mention of a great man's name
Is often enough to achieve peace and security—
The mere mention of the moon's name
Ensured safety for the rabbits that dwelt by the lake.'

'And how did that happen?' asked the birds.

So the crow related the story of the rabbits and the elephants.

The Story of the Rabbits and the Elephants

In a certain forest, there lived a herd of wild elephants. Their chief was a huge old male called Chaturadanta.

Once, a great drought hit the forest. No rain fell for several years, and slowly all the ponds, lakes, springs, streams and waterfalls dried up. The animals of the forest began to die of thirst. The elephants too were suffering. At last, they approached Chaturadanta and said, 'Sire, we can bear this drought no longer. Our little ones are falling ill and dying. We must search for water, so that the little elephants may become strong and well again.'

Chaturadanta thought for a while, and then said, 'I know of a large lake several days' march from here. It is fed by an underground spring, and is therefore always full of water. We could go there.'

The elephants agreed and the herd set off for the lake. After walking without pause or rest for five days and five nights, they reached the lake. It was as large and full of water as Chaturadanta had remembered. The elephants drank as much of the sweet, fresh water as they could, and splashed and bathed in the lake to their hearts' content. As the sun began to set and evening fell, the happy elephants climbed out of the lake, refreshed and relaxed.

Now, in the soft earth all around the lake were hundreds of burrows belonging to a large colony of rabbits. As the elephants wandered here and there around the lake, they stepped, quite unknowingly, upon these burrows, destroying and crushing to death the rabbits living in them. After a while, the elephants gathered together and went back the way they had come, disappearing into their own forest.

'Oh, what shall we do?' cried the surviving rabbits in despair. 'Now that these huge, clumsy fellows know about our lake, they will come here again and again and step and stamp upon our homes till they have killed us all!'

'We must leave this place at once!' said one of the rabbits. 'That is the only way to escape complete annihilation!'

'No, no, friend, we cannot leave this place,' said another. 'The shores of this lake have been home to generations of rabbits—to our parents, our grandparents, our great-grandparents, and now to us and

our children. We cannot abandon our home because of these clumsy, careless elephants. No, we must think of a way to scare them off so that they never return!'

'Well, I know a way to make sure the elephants stay away,' said a wise old rabbit. 'As you all know, our king, Vijayadatta, lives on the moon. You have all seen him yourself when the moon is full. So let us send a messenger to the chief of the elephants. Let this messenger pretend that he comes not from us, but from Lord Chandrama, the moon god himself, with orders forbidding Chaturadanta and his herd to visit the lake. If the elephant chief believes the messenger, he and his herd will go away.'

The other rabbits agreed that it was a good plan and must be carried out right away. 'But we need a very clever rabbit to play the role of messenger,' cautioned the old rabbit. 'He must be able to convince Chaturadanta that he truly comes from Lord Chandrama.'

'Lambakarna is the most intelligent amongst us all! He should be the messenger!' declared the other rabbits. And so Lambakarna was sent to talk to the elephants.

Lambakarna hopped off in the direction taken by the elephants. Taking shortcuts and secret routes known only to him, he had soon overtaken the elephants. Taking care not to be seen, he ran ahead of them and placed himself upon a little hill that lay along their path. As the chief of the elephants, Chaturadanta, approached with his herd, Lambakarna called out to him. 'Stop, you wicked elephant!' he cried. 'How dared you defile the moon god's lake with your presence? Don't ever come back here again!'

'Who are you?' asked Chaturadanta, taken aback.

'My name is Lambakarna, and I bring a message for you from Lord Chandrama, the moon god.'

'Please tell me what the message is, and I will obey at once,' replied Chaturadanta, alarmed.

'Lord Chandrama orders that you and your elephant herd never return to this lake again. When you visited the lake, you crushed to death hundreds of rabbits and hurt and injured thousands more. The rabbits are Lord Chandrama's subjects and under his special protection. If you ever harm them again, Lord Chandrama himself will come down to earth and destroy you!'

Chaturadanta trembled to hear the rabbit's words. 'Where is Lord Chandrama now?' he asked.

'Well, he has come down to the lake to comfort the survivors of your clumsiness!' retorted Lambakarna.

‘Take me to him. I will meet him and personally apologize to him.’

Lambakarna led Chaturadanta back to the lake. By now, night had fallen, and the full moon, riding high in the clear sky, was reflected in the still waters of the lake. ‘There he is, Lord Chandrama himself,’ declared Lambakarna, pointing to the moon’s reflection.

Chaturadanta bowed reverently to the moon’s reflection, offered his most sincere apologies, and, promising never to visit the lake or bother the rabbits again, turned around and went away. The rabbits were never bothered by the elephants again and lived in peace and safety upon the shores of their lake.

‘And that is why I say,’ concluded the crow, ‘that often a great man’s name alone is enough to get you out of trouble.’ Ruffling his feathers and flapping his wings, he continued, ‘One more thing—if you hope for prosperity, never choose a scoundrel for a king. This owl is a vile and evil bird, and quite uninterested in your welfare. He is selfish and unscrupulous and cannot be relied on to rule over you with justice and fairness. After all,

Expecting justice from a vicious cat
The hare and the sparrow were killed.’

‘Oh, and how did that happen?’ asked the birds.

So the crow told them the story of the hare, the sparrow and the cat.

The Story of the Hare, the Sparrow and the Cat

Once (*said the crow*), I used to live upon a certain tree. In a hollow in the same tree there lived a sparrow called Kapinjala. Every evening, as the sun went down, we would sit together on our tree and discuss the day's happenings and tell each other of the strange and wonderful things that we had seen. In this way, we became firm friends.

One morning, Kapinjala flew off as usual in search of food. I waited for his return in the evening as always, but that day he did not come back. As the hours passed, I grew more and more anxious. I waited all night for my friend, and soon it was morning. There was still no sign of Kapinjala, and I grew convinced that something terrible had happened to him. He had either been caught in a trap, I thought, or worse, he had been killed.

Just then a hare came lolloping by. Seeing Kapinjala's empty hollow in the tree, the hare climbed in and made himself at home. I had given up all hope for my friend's return, so I, too, did not say anything to the hare, but let him remain.

Now, as it happened, Kapinjala came back the very next night! He, together with some other sparrows, had found a field of ripened grain, and had been so busy filling their little tummies that they had quite forgotten to return home. When they had eaten as much as they could, they had thought of their cosy nests and comfortable hollows again and come flying back.

Kapinjala was most annoyed to see the hare in his house. 'Hey, you there! Why are you in my house? Get out at once!' he scolded.

But the hare refused to come out. 'This is my house now,' he said. 'Don't you know that your right of residence in lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, temples and trees holds good only as long as you occupy a particular spot? Once you go away, the spot belongs to whoever takes your place. You have no right to claim it back. This is a law that has been stated in all the books! So go away! This house is now mine, not yours.'

'Is that so?' retorted the sparrow. 'If you will argue books with me, then let us put our case before someone who is learned in law. Let him decide whose house this is!'

‘All right!’ agreed the hare, and the two set off in search of someone who knew the law and could settle their dispute. Curious to know what the outcome of their debate would be, I followed them.

Now, a cat called Tikshadanta had overheard their quarrel. Hurrying ahead of them, he sat down by the bank of a river that lay in their path and which he knew they must cross. As the sparrow and the hare approached, he closed his eyes and, assuming the posture of a yogi deep in meditation, began to chant and pray loudly. ‘This world is meaningless! Life is as fleeting as a moment in time! Everything is illusion! Asceticism is the only way forward!’ he recited.

The hare was deeply impressed by the cat’s saintly mien. ‘Oh look, Kapinjala, there seems to be an ascetic sitting by the river,’ he said, pointing. ‘He is chanting in a very learned fashion and seems to know what is written in all the books. Why don’t we ask him to settle our argument?’

‘He is a cat, and our natural enemy,’ cautioned Kapinjala. ‘Therefore, we must take care to speak to him only from a distance, lest our presence tempts him to break his holy vows and eat us!’

So the two called out to the cat from a safe distance and said, ‘Reverend sir, we have a quarrel that we cannot settle. You seem wise and learned, so please help us sort out our dispute. Tell us who is right and who is wrong. And as payment for your trouble, you can eat whichever one of us you say is wrong.’

‘No, no, my friends, do not say that!’ protested the cat piously. ‘I will most certainly help you resolve your quarrel, but I will not eat either of you! I have taken the holy vow of non-violence and do not harm even the smallest insect on this earth. How, then, can I harm you? You have nothing to fear from me. But I have grown old and cannot hear very well. So do draw near and tell me what your quarrel is about.’

What more remains to be told? That sly and cunning cat convinced the sparrow and the hare of his noble nature so completely that they forgot all caution and went up to him. As soon as they were close enough, the evil cat pinned one down with his paw while he tore into the other with his teeth. And that is how the hare and the sparrow were killed by the cat.

‘And that is why I say that a cruel, unscrupulous and selfish king will only bring his subjects grief and sorrow. All of you, by choosing this vile and cruel bird for your king, will also end up like the hare and my friend, the sparrow,’ said the crow. ‘Anyway,’ he continued, flapping

his wings, ‘you asked for my opinion, and I have said what I needed to say. Now all of you must do what you feel is right.’

‘The crow is right,’ said the birds to each other. ‘Maybe we were a little hasty in our desire to choose a new king. Let us leave the issue for another day!’ One by one the birds flew away till only the crow was left, and the owl with the faithful bird, Krikalika, sitting upon the golden throne still waiting for his coronation.

After a while, the owl, who was blind by day and had not seen that the other birds had flown away, called out, ‘What is the delay? Why have I not been crowned yet?’

Krikalika replied, ‘Lord, your coronation has been stopped by this crow. The birds have all flown away, except this crow, who is still sitting here for some reason.’

Hearing this, the owl was greatly disappointed. ‘Why did you do this?’ he asked the crow angrily. ‘How have I ever harmed you that you should stop my coronation as king of the birds? Because of your meddling, from now on, you and I will always be enemies, as will our families and followers! A wound inflicted by a sword can heal, but the wound inflicted by words cuts so deep that it can neither heal nor be forgotten!’ And so saying, the owl flew away with Krikalika to his nest.

The crow looked after the owl in consternation. ‘I have brought the owl’s anger upon myself for no reason at all. I should not have spoken as unthinkingly as I did,’ he reflected. ‘A wise man, however strong, does not make enemies if he can help it. Nor should one speak ill of others in a gathering. Such words, even if they be true, only bring trouble upon oneself.’ Shaking his head at his own foolishness, the crow slowly flew away.

‘And that is the reason,’ concluded Sthirajivi, ‘for this deadly enmity between the crows and owls.’

Meghavarna looked worried. ‘In such a situation then, what must we do?’ he asked.

‘Deception and trickery are our only options; nothing else will work,’ replied Sthirajivi. ‘I myself will adopt these methods and use them to destroy our enemy. After all, it was through trickery that the three sly thieves outwitted the brahmin and stole his goat!’

‘Oh, and how did they do that?’ asked Meghavarna.

So Sthirajivi told him the story of the three clever thieves, the brahmin and his goat.

The Story of the Three Clever Thieves, the Brahmin and His Goat

In a certain town, there lived a brahmin called Mitrasharma, whose job was to keep the sacrificial fire burning in the temple. Every now and then, he would sacrifice a goat or two in honour of the gods. One overcast day in the month of *Magh*, he set off to a neighbouring village to look for a goat he could sacrifice. Reaching the village, he made his way to the home of a rich man who lived there, and asked him to donate a goat to the temple. The rich man, who was very devout, readily agreed, and gave him a plump goat to take back to the temple. The brahmin, satisfied, took the goat upon his shoulders and began his journey homewards.

Mitrasharma's path led him through a dense forest. As he trudged along happily, who should catch sight of him but three crooked thieves! The thieves were hungry, they hadn't eaten for days, and when they saw the sleek, plump goat across the brahmin's shoulders, their mouths began to water. 'If we can somehow take that goat for ourselves, we could roast it and make a nice meal of it!' said one. 'Yes, let's trick that brahmin into giving us his goat,' said the others.

The three hid themselves in the trees along the road. As Mitrasharma passed by, the first thief stepped out of the trees and called out to him, 'O brahmin, you are a priest of the temple! Why are you carrying that filthy dog on your shoulders?'

'Are you blind that you cannot see that this is a goat meant for sacrifice and not a dog?' retorted Mitrasharma indignantly.

'Please do not be annoyed,' said the thief, apologetically. 'If you will insist that the dog is a goat, then so be it.'

Mitrasharma continued along the path, shaking his head at the man's foolishness. A little later, the second thief stepped out from the trees and called out, 'O brahmin, why are you carrying that dead calf upon your shoulders? You are a priest of the temple. Don't you know that dead animals are unclean?'

'Are you blind that you call this goat a dead calf?' cried Mitrasharma angrily.

‘Don’t be annoyed, respected sir,’ said the second thief. ‘Yes, I do see a dead calf across your shoulders, but if it seems like a goat to you, then so it must be.’

Mitrasharma gave the thief an angry glare and continued walking. As he walked farther down the path, the third thief stepped out of the trees and said, ‘Oh brahmin, why are you carrying a donkey upon your shoulders? Don’t you know that the donkey is a dirty and unclean animal? Set that filthy creature down! As a priest of the temple you should not even touch these animals, leave alone carry them on your shoulders!’

Now Mitrasharma was really confused. Three different men had stopped him, and each had seen a different creature upon his shoulders. What was going on? ‘What if,’ he thought, ‘these men are right, and what I am carrying upon my shoulders is not a goat at all but a shape-changing ghoul that looks sometimes like a dog, or a dead calf, or a donkey?’ This thought frightened Mitrasharma so much that he dropped the goat where he stood and ran off screaming through the trees.

The three clever thieves, chuckling at the brahmin’s terror, caught the goat, killed it and roasted it and made a hearty meal of it. And that is how the thieves tricked the brahmin.

‘In the same way, deception and deceit can be used to outwit an enemy and gain your ends,’ concluded Sthirajivi. ‘And now,’ he continued, ‘listen to my plan to outwit the owls and destroy them.’

‘Please tell me,’ said Meghavarna, ‘and I shall do as you say.’

So Sthirajivi explained his plan to the king. ‘Declare me to be your enemy. Then threaten and curse me as loudly and as harshly as you can, so that the owl’s spies become convinced that you have stripped me of my office. Get some blood from somewhere, and smearing my body with it, throw me out of this banyan tree. Not too far from here lies a mountain called Rishyamuka. You must take all the other crows with you and fly away to this mountain, leaving me behind, apparently hurt and bleeding, at the foot of this tree. Build a strong fort upon the mountain and wait there with your family and followers. Meanwhile, I will make friends with the owls and do everything I can to gain their trust. I will find out all I can about their stronghold. As you know, the owls are blind by day. So I will use this weakness of theirs and, finding the right opportunity, I will kill them all. Now, do exactly as I have said. Do not hesitate, do not stop me and, above all, do not show any pity towards me.’ And so saying, Sthirajivi started a

pretend quarrel with Meghavarna.

The other crows, hearing Sthirajivi abusing and cursing Meghavarna, came rushing, ready to kill Sthirajivi. ‘No, no, stay away!’ ordered Meghavarna. ‘I will take care of this traitorous rogue myself. He has betrayed us to our enemies and I will punish him for his treachery!’ And Meghavarna attacked Sthirajivi, and pretended to peck at him with his beak. Smearing him with some blood from a dead animal that he had scavenged earlier, he pushed him off the banyan tree. Sthirajivi, playing his part, lay at the foot of the tree as though badly injured. Meanwhile, Meghavarna gathered the rest of the crows together, and flew off with them to Mount Rishyamuka.

Now the bird Krikalika, ever faithful to the owls, and spying upon the crows on their behalf, witnessed the quarrel between Meghavarna and his minister and saw the crows flying away from their tree. She flew at once to the king of the owls, Arimardana, and said, ‘Sire, your enemy, terrified of you, has flown away somewhere with his family and all his followers.’

The king of the owls was overjoyed to hear this. As dusk fell, he gathered his followers and set off to battle the crows. ‘Hurry, hurry,’ he urged his troops. ‘It is great good fortune when the enemy flees his own fort in fear! He makes himself vulnerable and leaves behind a trail that is easy to follow. His people grow confused, his troops disorganized, so that it becomes a simple matter to take him captive or destroy him.’

Encouraged by the words of their king, the owls flew to the banyan tree and found that Krikalika’s report had been correct—the crows had indeed left the banyan tree. Arimardana perched himself on a branch of the tree with great satisfaction. ‘Search for the routes the crows might have taken!’ he ordered his followers. ‘We must follow them as quickly as we can and kill them before they find shelter somewhere else!’

Meanwhile, Sthirajivi, who was still lying at the bottom of the tree, was watching and listening. ‘Now, if our enemies leave as they have come, then I would have accomplished nothing!’ he said to himself. ‘I must complete what I have begun. So maybe it is now time to make my next move and let the owls know I am here.’ Sthirajivi began cawing in a weak and feeble manner as though he was greatly injured.

Hearing his calls, and seeing him lying apparently half-dead at the foot of the tree, the owls prepared to kill him. Sthirajivi began to weep and wail. ‘Look at me,’ he wept, ‘I am Sthirajivi, minister to Meghavarna, king of the crows. It is Meghavarna who has reduced me

to this pitiable condition, and left me here to die. Tell your king that I would speak with him—I have much that I want to tell him.'

At this, Arimardana came forward and, seeing the old crow lying there covered in blood, asked him, 'What happened? Who reduced you to this sorry state?'

'Lord, yesterday, seeing the corpses of the many crows you had killed, Meghavarna became crazy with grief and anger. He wanted to pursue you and attack you. I tried to stop him. I pointed out to him that you were much stronger, and that he would surely be defeated were he to attack you. My words angered him greatly. He accused me of being a traitor. In his fury, he turned upon me and reduced me to this state. Now I seek your protection. In return, once I have recovered from his attack and can walk and fly again, I will take you to his stronghold and help you to destroy him and all his followers.'

Hearing Sthirajivi's words, Arimardana decided to consult his ministers. There were five of them—venerable old owls who had served under his father and his father's father. They were called Raktaksha, Kruraksha, Diptaksha, Vakranasa and Prakarakarna. He turned first to Raktaksha. 'Respected sir,' he said, 'a minister of the enemy king has fallen into our hands. What do you think we should do with him?'

'Kill him,' replied Raktaksha at once. 'An enemy must be destroyed at the first opportunity, before he grows too strong. The crow is weak and injured just now and to kill him will be easy. And remember, he is our enemy. All friendship between our two peoples was destroyed long ago. So don't be fooled by his show of affection. As the snake said,

Look at the burning pyre
Look at my scarred and injured hood
Friendship, once broken, cannot be mended
By a mere show of affection.'

'Oh, and what did he mean by that?' asked Arimardana.

So Raktaksha told him the story of the brahmin and the cobra.

The Story of the Brahmin and the Cobra

In a certain town, there lived a poor brahmin called Haridatta. He spent all his days working on the small piece of land he owned. Though he worked very hard, his field never yielded good crops, and there was never enough for him and his family to eat.

One hot day towards the end of summer, the brahmin, exhausted after a long day of work digging and sowing, lay down to rest in the shade of a tree that grew upon his land. As he lay there, half asleep, he saw a cobra suddenly appear atop a nearby anthill. As he watched, the snake reared up its head and spread its hood. The brahmin sat up in alarm. 'This snake must be the god watching my land,' he thought. 'I have been remiss and never worshipped him in any way. He must be angry with me. That is why my hard work comes to nothing and my crops fail. From now on I will offer him puja every day!'

Thinking thus, the brahmin ran to his neighbour's house and asked for a saucer full of milk, which he carried back to his field. The snake was still there, poised upon the anthill as before. He placed the saucer near him and said, 'O divine guardian of the land, I had no idea that your abode was in my field. Therefore I never placed any offerings here for you before today. Please forgive my mistake.' The brahmin then nudged the saucer of milk closer to the snake and left.

Next morning, when he returned to his field, he saw a gold coin glistening in the empty saucer. The same thing happened the next day and the next. In this way, the brahmin would make an offering of milk to the cobra every evening, and return the following morning to find a gold coin in the saucer.

One day, the brahmin had to go to a neighbouring village on some work. Before he left, he took his son aside and gave him instructions to leave a saucer of milk every evening near the anthill under the tree upon their land. The son did as his father had asked. The next day, when he returned with some more milk, he saw a gold coin in the saucer. 'The anthill must be full of gold,' thought the son to himself. 'What if I kill the snake and take all the gold at once? That way we won't have to wait each day for a coin!'

Placing his offering of milk near the anthill, the boy hid himself

behind the tree and waited for the snake to emerge. As the snake came out and began to drink the milk, the boy jumped out from behind the tree and struck it a mighty blow upon its head. The snake, though badly hurt, did not die. Instead, it reared up and struck the boy with its sharp and poison-filled fangs. The boy died instantly. The boy's relatives, finding him lying dead there, built a pyre under the tree and cremated him on the spot.

When the brahmin returned, his relatives told him what had happened. Though sad and grieving at his son's death, the brahmin nevertheless condemned what the boy had done. 'He who does not protect a living creature that comes seeking shelter will lose that which is most precious to him—as did the golden swans upon the lake of lotuses.'

'Oh, and how did that happen?' asked his relatives.

So the brahmin told them the story of the golden swans.

The Story of the Golden Swans

In a certain town there lived a king called Chitraratha who owned a beautiful lake called Padmasar. The lake was covered with lotuses, and upon it lived a flock of golden swans. Every six months the swans would each shed a golden feather, which the king would collect.

One day, another golden bird, called Hemvarna, arrived at the lake. 'Hey, you can't stay here,' protested the swans. 'This lake belongs to the king, and only we have the right to live here. Every six months we give him a golden feather each for the privilege of living here!' The swans continued to protest and argue, till at last the golden bird decided to appeal to the king.

'Sire,' he said, 'the swans upon your lake say that I cannot live there, and that even you, the king, can do nothing about it for every six months they pay you a golden feather each for the lake. Please decide if they are right or I am.'

At this the king summoned his soldiers. 'Go at once to the lake,' he ordered, 'and kill each and every one of those impertinent golden swans!' The soldiers ran to do the king's bidding.

An old swan at the lake saw the soldiers coming. 'This doesn't look good for us, my friends,' he called to the other swans. 'We must fly away at once, before the king's soldiers kill us all!'

The other swans heeded the old swan's warning, and the whole flock rose as one into the air and flew away. They could never return to the lake again, and thus, by refusing shelter to the golden bird, they lost their beloved and beautiful home.

'And that is why I say,' concluded the brahmin, 'that those who refuse to protect those who come to them seeking shelter lose what is most precious to them.'

The next day, the brahmin carried his usual offering of milk to the cobra. Placing the saucer upon the anthill, he began calling loudly to the snake. The snake ignored his calls, but the brahmin refused to give up and begged the snake to appear. After a while, the snake replied from within the anthill, 'You have put aside your grief for your son and come to me only out of greed. Your son attacked me viciously

with a stick and injured me. I, in anger, bit him and killed him. How can I forgive your son's attack upon me? And how can you forgive his death? With such matters between us, it is not possible for you and me to be friends any more.' So saying, the snake emerged from the anthill and handed the brahmin a large and glittering jewel. 'Now go away and never come back here again,' he said.

The brahmin accepted the truth of the snake's words, and, lamenting his son's foolishness, returned home.

'And that is why I say that friendship, once broken, cannot be mended,' concluded Raktaksha. 'Your best course of action is to kill this crow, and, with his death, your kingdom will become free of your enemies.'

The king of the owls now turned to the second of his counsellors, Kruraksha. 'And what is your opinion, noble lord?' he asked him with respect.

'Sire, Raktaksha's suggestion is harsh and cruel,' replied Kruraksha. 'It is not right to kill someone who comes seeking sanctuary. The turtle dove welcomed even his enemy, who came looking for shelter, and went as far as to give him his own flesh to eat.'

'And how was that?' asked Arimardana.

So Kruraksha told him the story of the turtle dove and the bird catcher.

The Story of the Turtle Dove and the Bird Catcher

Once, there lived a cruel and wicked bird catcher. He had no family, no friends and no well-wishers, for he was so evil that no one wanted to have anything to do with him. He would spend all his days in the forest, cages, traps and snares in hand, searching for birds to trap.

One day, a little turtle dove was caught in his snare. He immediately picked her up and locked her in a cage. Even as the bird catcher stood there, gloating over his catch, a great storm blew up out of nowhere. Within moments, the sky became overcast, a strong wind began to blow and the rain to come down in sheets. The river began to flood and it seemed as though the forest, so calm and peaceful just a few minutes ago, would be swept away in a fury of thunder and rain. The bird catcher, trembling and terrified, took shelter under a large tree.

After several hours, the rain lessened, then stopped, and the clouds blew away. But, by then, night had fallen and the forest was cloaked in darkness. The only light came from the stars twinkling in the now clear sky. The bird catcher shivered with fear and cold, and through chattering teeth muttered a short prayer. ‘Whoever lives in this tree, I come to them seeking shelter. May they protect me. I am cold and very hungry.’

Now it so happened that that very tree was the home of the little turtle dove he had caught and her husband. The male turtle dove sat all alone in their hollow, worrying that his beloved wife had still not returned home. ‘What a terrible storm that was! What if my dear wife was caught in it? What if she is hurt or in danger?’ he wept. ‘Our lovely home lies empty and silent without her. As for me, my life is meaningless without her by my side.’

His wife, the little turtle dove, trapped in the bird catcher’s cage, heard him sigh and weep. Sad and afraid though she was, her heart filled with tenderness at her husband’s words, and she called out to him, ‘Dear husband, do not weep, but listen to me. Here is the bird catcher, come to our tree. He has asked us for shelter, and he is cold and hungry. He is our guest and it is our duty to take care of his needs.’

Hearing his wife's voice, the male turtle dove was overjoyed, but when he realized that she was a prisoner in the bird catcher's cage, he grew angry.

'Beloved husband, do not be angry with the bird catcher,' said the little turtle dove. 'I fell into his trap because of my own carelessness. Even in our grief, let us not forget our duty.'

The male turtle dove, hearing his wife's kind and virtuous words, did as she said. Flying down to the bird catcher, he said, 'You have asked for shelter under my tree, so you are my honoured guest. Make yourself at home, and I will strive to look after your every need.'

'Oh bird, I am dying of cold,' said the bird catcher, 'help me get warm again.'

At this, the turtle dove flew off and came back with a live coal in his beak. He dropped it into a pile of leaves and soon a merry fire was blazing away. The bird catcher gratefully held out his hands to the fire and warmed himself.

'Our guest is still hungry, but I have nothing that I can offer him to eat except myself,' said the turtle dove. And so saying, he flew into the flames, killing himself, so that his guest could eat his roasted flesh.

At this, even the cruel bird catcher was moved to tears. 'I am a vile and wicked man! All my life I have caused grief and pain to others. No longer will I live this life of evil!' he cried. He threw away his traps and snares and freed the little turtle dove from her cage. The little turtle dove, though, was heart-broken at her husband's death, and followed him into the flames.

Though the two turtle doves perished in the flames, their spirits rose up into the sky in a blaze of gold. As for the bird catcher, he gave up his evil ways and plunged himself into prayer and meditation. He did not harm another creature again, but lived out the rest of his days in the forest as an ascetic.

'And that is why I say, taking a lesson from the turtle dove who welcomed his enemy and even gave him his own flesh to eat, we must not kill someone who has come to us seeking our protection,' concluded Kruraksha.

Arimardana now turned to the third counsellor, Diptaksha, and asked, 'Respected sir, what is your opinion? What would you advise me to do in this situation?'

'Sire, it would not be right to kill the crow,' replied Diptaksha. 'Sometimes, even an enemy has his uses. See how the thief unwittingly helped the rich old merchant he had come to rob!'

‘Oh, and how was that?’ asked Arimardana.
So Diptaksha told him the story of the merchant and the thief.

The Story of the Merchant and the Thief

In a certain town there once lived a rich, old merchant. His wife had died a few years ago and, unwilling to spend his old age alone, he had offered a handsome sum of money to a poor merchant for his daughter's hand in marriage. The poor merchant had agreed and married his daughter to the old man.

Now the rich merchant, though very wealthy, had straggly grey hair and wrinkly skin. His new bride, who was young and beautiful, did not like him at all. She would barely look at him, leave alone come near him or spend any time in his company. This made the merchant even more despondent than before. 'Though I have a lovely new wife, I am still a lonely old man,' he wept.

One night, as the merchant and his new wife lay asleep, a thief entered their house. The wife, hearing a noise, woke up, and saw the thief skulking around their room. Terrified, she grabbed her husband's arm. The old merchant woke up, pleasantly surprised to find his wife clinging to him. 'Why this sudden love for me?' he wondered. He peered into the darkness to see the thief standing at the foot of their bed, and understood the reason for his wife's sudden affection. 'Hey there, thank you!' he said to the thief. 'My wife refuses to even speak to me, but today, thanks to you, see how she is willing to let me hold her in my arms! This has made me very happy! Take whatever you want from my house, all my riches are yours!'

'Keep your riches, merchant. You have nothing that I want tonight! I shall return another time when you have something worth stealing,' said the thief. 'Or if your wife stops loving you again!' he added with a chuckle, and disappeared nimbly through the window.

'So, you see, sometimes even an enemy who means you harm can turn out to be quite useful!' concluded Diptaksha. 'Besides,' he continued, 'this crow has been treated so badly by his own people that he may be willing to work for us and even tell us their weaknesses. That is why I would say, do not kill him.'

Arimardana heard Diptaksha's words, then turned to the fourth of his counsellors, Vakranasa, and asked him, 'Minister, what would you

advise? What should I do?'

'Sire, this crow must not be killed, not for any reason, or under any circumstance,' replied Vakranasa. 'He has fallen out with his king, and discord between one's enemies is always beneficial. For

Look how the thief saved the brahmin's life
And the pishach his two calves.'

'Oh, and how did that happen?' asked Arimardana.

So Vakranasa told him the story of the brahmin, the thief and the pishach.

The Story of the Brahmin, the Thief and the Pishach

In a certain town there lived a very poor brahmin called Drona. He was so poor that he had no money even to buy food. He somehow survived on the generosity of the townspeople and the alms they gave him in charity. He had never seen fine clothes or jewels, while sweet-smelling perfumes and betel leaves were luxuries he could not even dream of. Living as he did a life of hunger and hardship, his skin had grown dry and wrinkled, his hair and beard were matted and unkempt, and his nails were so long that they looked like talons.

One day, a kind man, taking pity on him, gave him two little calves as a gift. From the very first day, the brahmin took very good care of the two small creatures. Forgetting his own needs, he spent all day begging for food for his calves. He fed them the best fodder and the sweetest grass that he could get, so that in no time at all the calves grew fat and strong.

A thief noticed the two young calves. 'I will steal these calves from the brahmin,' he thought, 'for they will grow up into fine cows and give me plenty of milk and butter.' So, one night, taking a long rope with him, he set off for the brahmin's house. On the way he saw a strange and terrifying man coming towards him. He had sharp, pointed teeth and a long, upward-curving nose. His eyes were huge and red, his cheeks gaunt and grey, and his beard, which was so long that it fell all the way to his waist, blazed as though on fire. His arms and legs were covered with veins and knotted sinews. The thief plucked up his courage and asked, 'Who are you?'

'My name is Satyavachan,' said the man. 'I am a pishach, the evil spirit of a man who was unutterably cruel when he was alive. Now tell me who you are.'

'My name is Krurakarma,' replied the thief. 'I am a thief, and I am on my way to a poor brahmin's house to steal his two plump calves.'

'Friend, I have not eaten for six days and I am starving,' declared the pishach. 'I had set out in search of food when I ran into you. So let me come with you—I will eat the brahmin, while you steal his calves.'

The two continued on their way together, congratulating themselves on their good fortune in running into each other. Reaching the poor brahmin's house, they stole inside and hid themselves in a dark corner waiting for the right moment to carry out their plan.

Soon the brahmin lay down upon his mat and fell asleep. 'Now's my chance,' thought the pishach, and made to step out of his corner. But the thief stopped him and whispered, 'No, no, my friend. First let me steal the calves, and once I have got away with them, you can stay behind and have your meal.'

'No, no, I should go first,' whispered the pishach. 'What if you or the calves make a noise and wake the brahmin up? Then my plan to eat him will come to nothing! So I will go first.'

'No, absolutely not!' retorted the thief. 'I will go first! What if someone comes while you are sitting there eating your dinner? That will put an end to all my plans! I will go first.'

The two argued back and forth in this way, getting angrier and angrier with each other. Very soon they forgot to whisper and began to shout and yell loudly at each other, creating such a commotion that the brahmin woke up. 'What's going on? Who are you?' he demanded, sitting up.

'Brahmin, this pishach wants to eat you!' cried the thief, pointing at Satyavachan.

'Brahmin, this thief wants to steal your calves!' cried the pishach, pointing at Krurakarma.

The brahmin was now wide awake. He stood up and, calling upon the gods, began to chant all the sacred spells he knew. This frightened the pishach so much that he ran away as fast as he could. The brahmin then picked up a stout stick, which frightened the thief so much that he too ran away.

'So that is how discord between his enemies saved the brahmin's life and his calves as well. And so I say that this crow must not be killed,' concluded Vakranasa.

Arimardana now turned to the fifth counsellor, Prakarakarna and asked, 'What do you think I should do?'

'Sire, this crow must not be killed—of that I am certain. It is quite possible that by letting him live, friendship may develop between the two of you, and from that between our two peoples. And then this age-old enmity between the crows and the owls may even come to an end and we could live together in peace and prosperity. After all, those who reveal and attack each other's weaknesses will perish like

the two snakes who lived in the anthill and the prince's belly.'

'Oh, and how did that happen?' asked Arimardana, intrigued.

So Prakarakarna told him the story of the two snakes.

The Story of the Two Snakes

In a certain town, there lived a king called Devashakti. In his son's belly there lived a snake, because of which the prince grew weaker and weaker every day. The king consulted every doctor, every physician and every wise man in his kingdom, but no one could cure the prince. One day, the prince, tired and fed up of his existence, left the palace and went away to a neighbouring country. There, he made his home in a temple and lived on whatever alms he could beg.

Now, the king of that country had two beautiful daughters. Every morning, the two young women would greet their father at dawn. The older daughter would say, 'Sire, may you be victorious and live forever. It is your grace alone that gives me all the joys of life,' while the younger daughter would only say, 'Sire, may you receive the fruits of your actions.' The king loved his older daughter's flattery, but grew more and more irritated with the words of his younger daughter. One day, he could bear it no longer, and, calling his ministers, ordered them to take her away and get her married off to a stranger so that he may never have to see her again. 'Let her taste the fruits of her words and see how she likes it,' roared the king in anger.

'As you say, sire,' said the ministers, and taking away the younger princess, they married her to the prince living in the temple. 'Serves her right,' they said, and went away.

But the princess liked her prince immensely, and very soon the two young people fell in love. The princess did not want to live in her father's kingdom any more, so the two went away to another land far away where they made their home by the side of a pond. The prince was growing weaker by the day, but the princess looked after him with great affection, making sure that he was always comfortable and had everything he needed.

One day, she left her husband at home and went to the market to buy ghee, oil, spices, salt and rice so she could cook their evening meal. When she returned, she found her husband fast asleep under a tree, his head resting close to an anthill. Suddenly she saw coming out of her husband's mouth the hooded head and neck of a snake, and another snake emerging from the anthill. The princess quickly hid

behind a tree and watched in stunned surprise.

As the two snakes saw each other, their eyes reddened and they spread their hoods angrily. Said the snake from the anthill, 'You awful creature! Why do you live in the prince's belly and torture him in this manner? Can you not see how ill you have made him?'

'And why do you defile the two pots full of gold that lie buried in the anthill?' retorted the snake from the prince's belly.

'Do you think you are indestructible?' hissed the snake from the anthill. 'The prince has only to swallow a mixture of ground cumin and mustard seeds with hot water, and you will die!'

'Ha, and do you think *you* are indestructible?' sneered the snake from the prince's belly. 'Someone has only to pour hot oil or boiling water into the anthill, and you will die!'

The two snakes, hissing and arguing in this fashion, did not notice the princess behind the tree. She had heard everything, and did exactly as the snakes said. She killed the first snake with a mixture of cumin and mustard seeds and thus cured her husband; once the prince was well and strong, she killed the second snake by pouring boiling water into the anthill and dug out the treasure that lay beneath it. Thus, the princess received the fruits of her actions, and lived happily with her husband for the rest of their long lives.

'But the snakes who had quarrelled and argued, and revealed each other's weaknesses, died,' concluded Prakarakarna. 'That is why I say, it is better to cooperate than to fight. Do not kill the crow, sire, but make of him a friend.'

Arimardana, after considering the advice of his counsellors, decided to spare Sthirajivi's life.

Raktaksha, who had been listening to the discussion, shook his head in disagreement. 'This is terrible! You have given our king wrong advice and ensured his destruction!' he said to the other ministers. 'Mark my words, nothing good will come of this!' But the other owls paid no heed to his warning, and set off with Sthirajivi to their cave.

On the way, the crow turned to the king of the owls and dolefully said, 'Sire, why do you bother with one such as me? In my weak and battered state, I am of no use to you. All I want now is to fly into a fire and end my life. Please do not stop me.'

Raktaksha, who was keeping a close eye on the crow, asked suspiciously, 'And why do you want to do that?'

Sthirajivi looked dejected and sad. 'I have been reduced to this state by Meghavarna because I took the side of your people. So, to revenge

the wrong he has done me, I wish to be reborn as an owl.'

'You are a sly and crafty fellow, my friend, and good at deceit,' retorted Raktaksha, who could see right through Sthirajivi's plan. 'Even if you are reborn as an owl, you will still remain loyal to the crows. You will never leave your true nature behind! It is not easy to turn against your own kind. After all, the mouse-maiden turned down the sun, the clouds, the wind and the mountain—only to marry a mouse!'

'Oh, and how did that happen?' asked the other ministers, who had been listening to Raktaksha's conversation with the crow.

So Raktaksha told them the story of the mouse-maiden who married a mouse.

The Story of the Mouse-maiden Who Married a Mouse

On the banks of the river Ganga where, turbulent with whirlpools and flecked with white foam, it fell from the mountains on to the plains and frightened the fishes that dwelt in it by the sound of its thundering descent, there stood a hermitage. In the hermitage dwelt several ascetics, who subsisted only on roots and fruits and the pure and sacred water of the river. For clothes they wore simple loincloths made of bark, and their bodies were thin and emaciated with prayer and penance. The chief of this hermitage was a rishi called Yagyavalkya.

One morning, as the rishi finished his sacred dip in the river, a little mouse fell into his open palm from the beak of a falcon flying overhead. He placed the tiny creature gently on a leaf, and continued his prayers. When he had finished his rituals of bathing and puja, he used the powers he had acquired from years of penance and turned the little mouse into a baby girl. Carrying the baby home with him, he handed her to his wife, and said, 'Beloved wife, we have no children of our own. But the gods have heard our prayers and sent us this foundling child. Take her and bring her up as you would our own daughter.'

His wife was overjoyed. She took the little mouse-child into her arms, and from that moment on, looked upon her as her own child. The rishi and his wife loved the little girl dearly, and pampered and indulged her in every possible way.

The years passed and the little mouse-child grew up into a beautiful and accomplished young woman. 'Husband,' said the rishi's wife to him one day, 'can you not see that our daughter is now old enough to be married? You must find a suitable young man for her.'

'Yes, wife, you are right,' agreed the rishi. 'I will find a young man worthy of her in every way—he must be well-educated and handsome, a good man from a good family, who will make our daughter happy. So I will summon the sun and, if she likes him, we will marry her to him.'

His wife thought that was a good idea. So the rishi used his yogic powers to call the sun, and the sun appeared before them in their hermitage.

'Why have you called me, O rishi?' asked the sun.

'This is my daughter, whom you see before you,' replied the rishi. 'If she is willing, please marry her.' Turning to his daughter, he said, 'Daughter, here is the sun himself to be your suitor. He is the lord of the universe, and his radiance lights up the three worlds. Would it please you to have him as your husband?'

'Dear father,' replied the mouse-maiden, 'his radiance blinds me and his blazing rays burn me. Find me someone better than him to be my husband.'

The rishi turned to the sun and asked, 'O bright and radiant lord, is there anyone in this world who is better than you?'

'Yes,' replied the sun. 'The cloud is better than me, because when he spreads himself across the sky, I become invisible.'

So the rishi summoned the cloud. But the mouse-maiden said, 'Dear father, he is so dark and sombre and serious-looking! Find me someone better than him.'

The rishi turned to the cloud and asked, 'O cloud, tell me, is there anyone in this world who is better than you?'

'Yes,' replied the cloud. 'The wind is better than me. If he so desires, he can blow me away!'

So the rishi summoned the wind. But the mouse-maiden said, 'Dear father, he is too restless for me. Find me someone better than him.'

The rishi turned to the wind and asked, 'O wind, you who go everywhere, tell me, is there anyone in this world who is better than you?'

'Yes,' replied the wind. 'The mountain is better than me. I can blow as hard as I like but I cannot move him.'

So the rishi summoned the mountain. But once again, the mouse-maiden refused. 'Dear father, his heart is of stone,' she said. 'I cannot marry him. Find me someone better.'

The rishi turned to the mountain and asked, 'O mountain, steadfast and strong, tell me, is there anyone in this world who is better than you?'

'Yes,' said the mountain. 'The mouse is better than me, for he can dig right through me.'

The rishi now summoned a mouse. 'My dearest daughter,' he said, 'do you like this little one?'

The mouse-maiden liked the little mouse at once. 'Oh dear father,

turn me back into a mouse so I may marry him and once again be with my own people,' she cried.

The rishi smiled, and, using his yogic powers once more, turned the maiden back into a mouse. The two mice married each other and lived happily ever after.

'And that is why I say,' concluded Raktaksha, 'it is difficult to forget one's own kind, no matter what the circumstances.'

But the other owls disregarded Raktaksha's words, and took Sthirajivi to their fortress cave. Sthirajivi laughed to himself as he saw the cave. 'These silly owls!' he thought. 'Only one amongst them has any intelligence! If they had but listened to him, there would be no trouble looming over their heads right now!'

Arimardana paused at the entrance to the cave and declared, 'Listen to me, owls! Sthirajivi is my well-wisher, so give him a place in the cave suitable to his station.'

This did not suit Sthirajivi at all. 'I have reached their secret cave,' said he to himself, 'but if I am to destroy the owls, I must make sure I do not enter the cave. Once inside, they will be able to keep watch on me and will see my every move. I will not be able to carry out my plan.' Thinking rapidly, he turned to the king of the owls and said, 'Sire, you do me great honour. But I am well versed in the laws of politics and know that though I am now your friend, follower and well-wisher, I was once your enemy, and therefore it is not right for me to enter your fortress. Therefore, let me remain at the entrance to the cave, where I can still see you every day and be blessed by the dust of your royal feet.'

The king gave his permission, and Sthirajivi took up residence at the entrance to the owl cave. The owls would fly back and forth, and, every day, upon their king's orders, would bring Sthirajivi choice bits of meat and carrion to feed upon. Soon, Sthirajivi became as strong and sleek as a peacock.

Raktaksha had been keeping an eye on Sthirajivi all this while and did not like the royal treatment the crow was receiving. 'Sire,' he said to the king one day, 'these ministers of yours are all great fools, and so are you. At least, so it seems to me! As the bird said

First, I was the foolish one
Then the huntsman
Then the minister and then the king
It seems we are a bunch of fools.'

‘And how was that?’ asked the other ministers, who were, as usual, listening in.

So Raktaksha told them the story of the bird with the golden droppings.

The Story of the Bird with the Golden Droppings

In a distant and mountainous country there grew a vast tree in which lived a magical bird called Sindhuka whose droppings would turn to gold as soon as they hit the ground. One day, an old huntsman in search of game happened to pass by the tree, and the bird, unthinking of the consequences, let his droppings fall in front of the hunter.

The huntsman, seeing the droppings turn to gold in front of his eyes, was overcome with astonishment. 'In all my eighty years of life, I have never seen such a wonder!' he exclaimed, and decided then and there to catch the bird. Spreading his net upon the tree, he waited.

A little later, the bird flew back to its tree, and was caught in the huntsman's net. The huntsman quickly untangled the bird and put it securely into a cage and hurried home with his prize. On the way he began to think. 'This bird could prove dangerous for me,' he said to himself. 'What if someone found out about the golden droppings? They would surely report me to the king, and the king, wanting the bird for himself, will have me killed. So rather than risk my life, I should take the bird to the king myself.' Making up his mind, he took the bird to the royal palace the very next morning and presented it to the king.

The king was delighted with the bird. 'Make sure this bird is properly looked after!' he said to his attendants. 'Give it as much food to eat and water to drink as it wants!'

The king's minister, who had been watching, spoke up. 'Sire,' said he, 'do you really believe the hunter's crazy story? Can a bird's droppings ever turn to gold? There is no point in keeping this poor bird a prisoner on the basis of an old man's foolish story! I suggest that we let the bird go!'

The king took his minister's advice, and, opening the cage, let the bird go. The bird flew away as fast as it could, pausing only for a moment to let fall some golden droppings in front of the king, and as it flew away it sang—'First I was the fool, then the hunter, then the minister and then the king,!'

'In the same way, we are all fools for sparing this crow's life,'

concluded Raktaksha. ‘I say again, kill him at once.’

But the king and the other ministers did not listen to Raktaksha, and continued to feed and pamper Sthirajivi. Raktaksha then gathered his family and loyal followers together and said, ‘I have tried my best to warn the king. But he has ignored my advice, and I am afraid that we are all in grave danger here. So the time has come to leave this place and fly away to some other safe and secure cave far away. As the jackal said

He who sees the future and acts accordingly rejoices
He who fails to see what’s coming gets into trouble
Living in these woods, old age has come upon me,
Yet never before had I known of a cave that roared at me.’

‘And how was that?’ asked Raktaksha’s family and followers.

So Raktaksha told them the story of the talking cave.

The Story of the Talking Cave

In a certain forest, there lived a lion called Kharanakhara. One day, it so happened that as he roamed the forest looking for prey, he could not find a single animal to kill and eat. He was hungry and tired, and as night fell, he took shelter in a small cave in the forest. As he sat in the cave he thought, 'Some creature or the other is bound to come into this cave seeking shelter during the night. So perhaps it is best that I remain here and wait for my dinner to walk in to me.' Thinking thus, the lion settled himself in the cave for the night.

Now, the cave belonged to a jackal named Dadhipuchchha, who, returning from his wanderings in the forest, saw the lion's footprints leading into his home but not coming out. 'I am dead! The lion must be lying in wait for me inside the cave!' he thought in panic. 'But how can I be certain that it is indeed so?' He thought for a while, then going up to the entrance of the cave, called out, 'Hey cave! Hello cave!' He fell silent and waited for a while. Hearing no sound from within, he called again, 'Hey cave! Have you forgotten our pact? We had agreed that whenever I return I would greet you, and you would greet me in return, and only then would I come in. Now if you don't reply and welcome me in, I will not enter but go away to another cave.'

The lion, who had been listening in silence, said to himself, 'It is clear that this cave greets the jackal upon his return every day. Today my presence has frightened it into silence. So let me pretend to be the cave and welcome the jackal in. He will enter the cave upon my invitation, and will instantly become my dinner.' Taking a deep breath, the lion roared a greeting as politely as he could. His roar echoed round the cave and the confined space magnified it to such an extent that it resounded through the forest far and wide, scaring the other animals almost out of their wits.

The jackal, of course, ran for his life as swiftly as he could. And so, because he had anticipated trouble and had acted accordingly, he survived. Had he not done so, but walked blindly into the cave, he would have definitely been killed and eaten.

‘And in similar manner, I sense disaster here,’ said Raktaksha. ‘So consider what I say, and come with me. Let us leave this cave and fly away to a safer place.’

Convinced by his story, his family and loyal followers took Raktaksha’s advice and flew away with him that very night to a distant land, safe from the schemes and stratagems of Sthirajivi the crow.

Sthirajivi was very pleased to hear of Raktaksha’s departure. ‘It is now much easier for me to carry out my plan to kill the owls. I will set fire to their cave and kill them all!’ he thought in glee. ‘Raktaksha was far-sighted and wise. The rest of the owls are stupid. Their king is now surrounded by fools, and without the clever Raktaksha to warn him, he will be easily destroyed. ’

Sthirajivi now began to put his evil plan into action. Each day he would add a dry twig to his nest at the entrance of the owl cave. The foolish owls did not realize that the crow was expanding his nest only so he could collect enough twigs to set fire to their cave. When his collection of twigs had grown large enough, Sthirajivi waited for the sun to rise. As day broke and the owls retired to their cave, he flew quickly to Meghavarna, king of the crows. ‘Sire,’ he said, ‘I have made all arrangements to set the enemy’s cave on fire. So hurry, come with your attendants, each one bringing with him a burning twig from the forest. Throw the twigs into my nest at the entrance of the owl cave. My nest will catch fire and our enemies will burn to death in their cave.’

Meghavarna was delighted to see his old minister. ‘But tell me first, how are you and where have you been? Tell me all that has happened to you.’

‘Sire, this is no time for delay,’ said Sthirajivi sharply. ‘It is possible that even as I speak an enemy spy has seen or heard us. If the owls find out what we are up to, all our plans will come to nothing. I will tell you everything later.’

Meghavarna heeded Sthirajivi’s advice, and flew with his followers to the owl cave. Each crow carried in its beak a burning twig, which it threw on the enormous nest that Sthirajivi had built. The nest caught fire at once, and in a matter of seconds the owl cave too was engulfed in flames. The owls, blind and helpless, could not fight the fire, and they perished, every one, in the blaze.

The crows, with their enemy destroyed, returned to their old banyan tree. When everyone had settled in comfortably once more, Meghavarna turned to Sthirajivi and said, ‘Now tell us, respected sir,

as you had promised, all that you did while you were away. We are all very eager to know—how did you spend your time with the enemy? Living with the enemy is like lying on the edge of a sword—one false move and you are dead. It must have been very difficult, not to say dangerous.'

'The owl king's ministers were a bunch of fools, which made my job easier,' replied Sthirajivi. 'There was only one, Raktaksha, who realized what I was planning, and so he flew away and escaped. The others did not have a grain of sense. They did not even know that someone who has left his own side and gone over to the enemy's can never be trusted for it is most likely that he has come there as a spy. I, on the other hand, lay low and waited for my chance. As you said, it was both difficult and dangerous, but it was my duty to serve my people, and so I set my own convenience aside and took on the task of lying on the sword's edge. After all, one who is clever and cunning bides his time, even bearing the enemy on his shoulders, as did the black serpent who ate up the frogs.'

'And how did he do that?' asked Meghavarna.

So Sthirajivi told him the story of the serpent and the frogs.

The Story of the Serpent and the Frogs

Near a certain mountain, there lived an old snake called Mandavisha. As the days passed, it became more and more difficult for him to hunt for prey. ‘I am now too old to hunt,’ he said to himself. ‘What can I do to make sure that I have a steady supply of food without too much effort?’ He thought hard for a while, and then, coming up with a plan, slithered to a nearby pond that was full of frogs. There, stationing himself by the pond’s edge and making sure the frogs could see him, he began to weave to and fro as though deeply agitated.

A watching frog called out and asked, ‘Uncle, what’s the matter? How come you are not busy hunting us for your dinner this evening?’

‘Ah son, how can one as unfortunate as me hope for dinner?’ sighed the snake. ‘I was out just now, looking for food, when I saw a frog leaping ahead of me. I went after him, but the frog jumped into a lake where a group of brahmins were bathing. In the failing light—for the sun is setting, as you can see—I could not see where it had gone, and quite by mistake I bit a brahmin’s young son, mistaking his toe for the frog. The boy died instantly, and his father, overcome by grief, cursed me. ‘You scoundrel,’ he said, ‘you bit my son for no reason at all and killed him! You will now spend the rest of your days serving the frogs as their steed, and you will eat only what the frogs allow you to eat!’ So here I am, at your service, O frogs!’

The frog told the other frogs all that the snake had said, and the other frogs told their king, a great big frog called Jalapada. Jalapada was delighted to hear this, and, taking his ministers with him, immediately swam to the spot where the snake lay waiting. He hopped out of the pond and on to the snake’s hood, where he sat feeling most grand and important. The other frogs hopped on to the snake’s back, and soon there was such a rush and clamour to ride on the snake that the frogs who couldn’t climb on to his back hopped along after him as he began to move. The snake, keen to convince the frogs of his sincerity, gave the frog king and his retinue a long ride, twisting and curving and slithering and sliding in all kinds of fancy manoeuvres. The frog king was very pleased with his new steed.

The next day, the snake returned and, when the frog king wanted a

ride, moved at a slow and boring crawl, quite unlike the previous day. ‘Why, snake, what is the matter?’ asked Jalapada. ‘Why are you moving so slowly?’

‘Sire, I am weak with hunger and do not have the strength to carry you properly today,’ replied the snake.

‘Well, why don’t you eat some of the smaller frogs?’ suggested Jalapada.

‘Since the brahmin has cursed me to eat only what you allow me to eat I shall accept your gracious offer,’ replied the snake humbly. He then proceeded, quite happily, to make a large and tasty meal out of the littler frogs. He would eat as many of the smaller frogs as he could every day, so that very soon he grew well and strong. Smiling to himself, he thought, ‘Thanks to my clever ploy, I am getting a steady supply of delicious frogs. I am well provided for as long as these frogs last.’

As for Jalapada, the frog king, he was so enamoured by his new steed that he was quite blind to the snake’s deceit. As the days passed and the supply of little frogs came to an end, the king gave the snake permission to eat the larger frogs, and then the even larger ones, till the snake had eaten up all the frogs, each and every one of them, including the frog king himself.

‘Sire,’ concluded Sthirajivi, ‘just as Mandavisha ate up all the frogs through cunning, I too destroyed the owls through deceit and clever thinking.’

‘You have done very well and have proved your worth,’ said Meghavarna, pleased. ‘You took up a difficult task and did not give up till the very end—that is a mark of true greatness. Lesser beings would have given up halfway or not dared to do what you have done.’

Sthirajivi bowed his head, graciously accepting the king’s praise. ‘Now that all your enemies are dead, you should focus on the welfare of your people. You have earned great glory, king, and may you live long to enjoy it. But glory is transient and can vanish in an instant if misused. So, O king, enjoy your royal status, but remember, rule your people with mercy and justice.’

‘And so ends the third part of your lessons,’ concluded Vishnusharma.

Part 4

The Loss of Gains

Vishnusharma said to the three princes, 'I shall now commence the fourth part of your lessons, which tells of gain and loss. The man who does not use his own judgement, but foolishly lets himself be persuaded by others, loses all his gains, while the man who keeps his head even in danger, and thinks calmly and clearly, overcomes even the most difficult situations. Look at how the crocodile was fooled by the clever monkey, who managed to escape with his life. This is how it happened.'

The Story of the Monkey and the Crocodile

It has been heard that, by an ocean shore, there once grew a great and ancient jamun tree, which bore fruit all year round. In that tree lived a monkey called Raktamukha. One day, a crocodile called Karalamukha swam out of the sea and, quite by chance, stopped to rest in the soft sand under the jamun tree.

The monkey was a friendly creature, so when he saw the crocodile he called out to him and said, 'Mr Crocodile, you have done me great honour by coming to my home. You are my guest, and have come a long way. You must be hungry and thirsty. Since it is my duty to look after you, I shall offer you some of the delicious jamuns that grow on my tree—they are sweet and juicy and will refresh you.' The monkey picked the best and biggest of the jamuns on his tree and threw them down to the crocodile.

The crocodile, pleased at the monkey's hospitality, ate the fruit, and then, his hunger satisfied, sat under the tree chatting with the monkey about this and that till it was time for him to go home. The crocodile had enjoyed the monkey's company very much, so he now began to visit the monkey daily.

The two friends would sit together under the shade of the jamun tree and feast on the delicious fruit while chatting happily with each other about matters both great and small. And at the end of every day, the crocodile would bid farewell to the monkey and return home, taking with him some of the leftover fruits for his wife.

One day, his wife, curious, asked, 'Beloved husband, where do you find these delicious fruits every day?'

'My dear wife,' replied the crocodile, 'my best friend is a monkey called Raktamukha; it is he who, out of his affection for me, gives me these fruits.'

'Imagine how sweet must be the heart of someone who eats such sweet fruits every day,' said his wife. 'Husband, if you love me, bring me that monkey's heart so that I may eat it. His heart will make me young again, and free me from old age and sickness, and I will be able to live with you forever.'

'Oh no, my dearest, I cannot do that,' objected the crocodile. 'The

monkey is my dearest friend, as close to me as though he were my brother. I cannot kill him. So, please, don't ask me for his heart.'

At this his wife's eyes filled with tears. 'You don't love me any more,' she wept. 'This monkey has become more important to you than I am.'

'No, my dear, of course not! I love you as much as I have always done,' protested the poor crocodile.

'Then get me the monkey's heart, or I will starve myself to death!' declared his wife.

The crocodile, who did truly love his wife, grew very worried. 'What shall I do? I cannot let my wife die, but how can I kill my friend?' he wondered. He sat for a long time with these anxious thoughts, and then, making up his mind, went to visit his friend.

The monkey had been waiting for him, and seeing him, called out, 'What is the matter, my friend? What took you so long today? And why are you looking so sad?'

'My friend,' replied the crocodile dolefully, 'my wife, your sister-in-law, scolded me sharply this morning because I have been taking these delicious fruits home every day, but never thought to thank you or invite you for a meal in return. She has ordered me to bring you home today. I was delayed because of this, and now I have come to beg you to come with me today, or else my wife threatens never to speak to me again.'

'Your wife, my sister-in-law, is quite right—good friends must visit each other,' said the monkey. 'There is one problem though: your home is in the middle of the ocean, while I, tree-dwelling creature that I am, cannot swim. So how will I get to your house? Instead, why don't you bring your wife with you the next time you visit me? That way she and I can meet and get to know each other.'

'Our home is on a quiet and sandy beach on the other side of the ocean, and I can carry you there quite easily upon my back,' replied the crocodile.

'If that is so, then let us go at once,' said the monkey. 'See, here I am, already upon your back,' he cried, as he jumped down from his tree and upon the crocodile's back.

The crocodile wasted no more time. He slipped into the ocean with the monkey on his back and began swimming rapidly through the waves. After a while, they had left the shore behind and were surrounded on all sides by the deep blue sea. The monkey grew afraid and said, 'Friend, slow down! You are swimming so fast that I am quite drenched by the splashing of the waves! If you keep this up, I

will drown before we reach your place!'

At this, the crocodile said to himself, 'He is now completely within my power. He cannot swim, so there is no way that he can escape. I might as well tell him the truth now so that he has time to pray to his gods before he dies.' Karalamukha then said to the monkey, 'Raktamukha, my friend, I am taking you home to kill you, as my dear wife has asked. So say your prayers and prepare to die.'

The monkey was horrified to hear this. 'What have I done to offend you or your wife that you should wish to kill me?' he asked.

'Well, my wife wants to eat your heart, which she believes must be sweeter than the jamun fruit you eat every day. Your heart, she says, will keep her from illness and old age. So, to satisfy her desire, I came up with this plan to trick you.'

Luckily, the monkey kept his wits about him. 'Oh, no! Dear friend, why didn't you tell me this before?' he exclaimed. 'You see, I don't carry my heart about with me, but keep it in a hollow in the jamun tree. Had you told me that my heart is what you wanted, I would have gladly given it to you. Now here I am, without my heart, and of no use at all to my dear sister-in-law.'

The crocodile was delighted to hear this—if the monkey's heart was not in his body, then maybe there was a way to fulfil his wife's wish without killing the monkey! 'My dearest friend,' he cried, 'if that is the case, please give me your heart and I will give it to my wicked wife so she can eat it and be satisfied. I will take you back this instant to your jamun tree.' Karalamukha turned around and, swimming as fast as he could, brought the monkey back to his jamun tree.

The monkey leapt off the crocodile's back and scampered up the tree, climbing as high as he could, far away from the crocodile's jaws. 'Thank the gods that they saved my life,' he cried in relief. 'I should never have trusted the crocodile in the first place. It has been rightly said that one should never trust an untrustworthy foe, or even a trusted friend beyond a point, for they are sure to let you down!'

Meanwhile, the crocodile stood waiting beneath the tree. 'Friend,' he called, 'do give me your heart so that I may take it to my wife and fulfil her evil desire.'

The monkey laughed scornfully and said, 'Can anyone separate their hearts from their bodies? You are a fool to have believed me, and a scoundrel to have betrayed our friendship. Go away at once and never come here again! I don't want to be friends with you any more. After all, it is wisely said that once a friend has become your foe, to trust him again is to ask for certain death!'

The monkey's words made the crocodile feel quite foolish. 'How silly I was to let him know my true intentions,' he said to himself. 'I must try and win his friendship back again.' Calling up to the monkey he said, 'Dear friend, this was all a joke, to test your real feelings for me. Don't take it so seriously. What use can my wife have for your heart? She means you no harm, but has prepared a lavish meal and is waiting eagerly for you. Do come home with me, brother. You will be our honoured guest.'

'You rascal! Go away at once. I will never come near you again,' cried the monkey angrily. 'After all, it has been said

What crime will a hungry man not commit?
The weak can be cruel indeed
Brother, tell the black serpent
That I shall never return to the well!'

'And how was that?' asked the crocodile.

So the monkey told him the story of the frog king and the serpent.

The Story of the Frog King and the Serpent

In a certain well there lived Gangadatta, king of the frogs. One day, fed up of being pestered by his relatives and kinsmen, he decided that he would leave the well. Hopping on to the waterwheel, and jumping from bucket to bucket, he managed to get out of the well. He then began to think, 'How shall I teach these bothersome relatives of mine a lesson? After all, it is said that a man, if he can pay back in the same coin those who have laughed at him or harmed him in times of trouble, is a man reborn. I must get my own back on my kinsmen.'

As he sat by the edge of the well, he saw a black serpent slither past and disappear into its den. The serpent was called Priyadarshana. As he sat staring at the snake, a plan formed in Gangadatta's mind. 'What if I invite this snake into the well and have him eat up all my annoying relatives? After all, it is always wise to get rid of a powerful enemy by allying with one even more powerful—the snake will destroy my relatives with ease, and I won't have to lift a finger!'

Reasoning thus with himself, Gangadatta hopped over to the entrance of the snake's den and called out, 'Priyadarshana, come out, come out!'

The snake hissed warily. 'Who could be calling me thus?' he wondered. 'He is definitely not one of my own kind, for his voice is not that of a snake. And except for other snakes and serpents, I have no family or friends. So who on earth could this be? I must make sure he isn't an enemy before I leave the safety of my den!' The snake called out cautiously, 'Who are you?'

'My name is Gangadatta, and I am the king of the frogs. I have come here to make friends with you!'

'To make friends with me?' said the snake disbelievingly. 'Does grass make friends with fire? You do know that I can eat you up in a single swallow, don't you?'

'Yes, yes, you are right,' said Gangadatta. 'You are my natural enemy, but it is upon being humiliated and harassed by another enemy that I come to you. I need your help!'

'Who has humiliated and harassed you?' asked the snake.

'My heirs and kinsmen, they have been making my life a torment,'

replied the frog.

'Where do you live? In a well? A pond? A lake? A stream?' asked the snake.

'In a well, bounded by a stone wall,' replied the frog.

'As you might have noticed, we snakes don't have feet,' retorted the serpent, 'and without feet I cannot climb into your well. Assuming, for a moment that I do manage to get in, there will be no space inside for me to live in comfort or hide to kill your kinsmen. So go away, and don't bother me again.'

'No, no, please listen to me,' said Gangadatta. 'I can get you into the well very easily, and inside, just above the waterline, is a dry and comfortable hole you can use for your den and from which you will be able very easily to kill and eat my annoying relatives. Please come with me and see it for yourself.'

'Hmm,' thought the snake. 'Maybe I should do as this frog says. After all, I am growing old, and it is becoming more and more difficult to hunt. On good days I can catch a mouse or two, but only with great difficulty. I should not turn down this opportunity for a comfortable life.' Making up his mind to help the frog, the snake slithered out of his hole and said, 'If such is the case, then lead the way, Gangadatta! Let's hurry to your well!'

The frog was overjoyed, and led the snake to his well. He helped the snake slither into the well by means of the waterwheel, and settled him comfortably into the little hole in the wall just above the water's surface. 'Now you must eat only the frogs that have been bothering me, and not my close friends or my wife and children,' said Gangadatta.

'Oh, do not worry, my friend,' said the snake. 'I will eat only those frogs you point out to me.'

Satisfied, Gangadatta showed him who his troublesome kinsmen were, and, over the next few weeks, Priyadarshana the snake, true to his promise, ate them all up, one by one. When all the annoying relatives had been eaten, the snake turned to the frog and said, 'My friend, I have done what you asked me to do. Now bring me something more to eat, for it is you who brought me here.'

'You have done what any friend would have done for another, so now I think it is time you go back the way you came,' replied Gangadatta rudely. 'So take yourself off, climb out of this well via the waterwheel and go back to your old hole!'

'Now, that's not very kind of you,' said the snake. 'You know I cannot return to my old den—I have been away so long, it must have

been taken over by some other creature by now. I am going to stay here, and unless you find me something to eat every day, I will eat up your wife, your children and your friends.'

Gangadatta grew deeply anxious at the snake's words. 'Oh, what have I done, to bring my own enemy into my home? It is truly said that he who seeks to make friends with an enemy more powerful than himself is doomed!' he lamented. 'If I want to save my family and dearest friends, I must do as the snake says! It is better that he eats some of the other frogs, even if they have never done me any harm, than that he eats my wife and children!' Thus convincing himself that his wisest course of action was to give in to the snake's demands, Gangadatta gave him one frog every day to eat.

The snake would eat the frog that Gangadatta brought to him and also snatch up a few more when Gangadatta wasn't looking. One day he gobbled up Gangadatta's son, Yamunadatta, along with a few other frogs.

When Gangadatta realized that his son had been eaten, he began to weep and wail, cursing himself for his foolishness. 'Stop this wailing!' cried his wife. 'What is the use of crying now, after our son is dead? You have, by your actions, caused the death and destruction of our entire clan. So now, when your own family is being eaten up, why do you scream and cry? If you have any sense, you will think instead of a way to kill this foul serpent and escape from here.'

In a few short days, the serpent had eaten up all the frogs in the well. Only Gangadatta himself remained. 'I am very hungry,' declared the snake to Gangadatta. 'You must get me something to eat, because, do not forget, you are the one who invited me here in the first place.'

'Friend, do not worry. As long as I am alive, I will make sure that you are well fed. If you give me permission, I will climb out of this well and go to another one and bring more frogs here to you.'

'Now that is an excellent idea,' agreed the snake. 'You have become like a brother to me, so I cannot eat you. Therefore hurry, bring me these other frogs, so that I may satisfy my hunger.'

Gangadatta wasted no more time, but hopped nimbly out of the well. Of course, he had no intention of returning.

Meanwhile, the snake waited patiently in the well for Gangadatta to return with more frogs. After a day had passed and Gangadatta had still not come back, he turned to the lizard who lived in another hole in the well and said, 'Brother, you run about everywhere. Please help me. You have known Gangadatta the frog all his life. Please find him and tell him that I am waiting for him. He should return home at

once, even if he cannot find any more frogs. I cannot bear to be without him any more. Tell him, too, that I will never harm him, I swear upon all the gods.'

The lizard ran off and, after searching for him everywhere, finally found Gangadatta living in another well. 'Gangadatta, your friend Priyadarshana says he is waiting for you. He has sworn on all the gods that he won't hurt you, and asks you to come back to the well as soon as you can.'

But Gangadatta was wiser now. 'There is no crime that a hungry man will not commit,' he replied. 'Brother, go back and tell the black serpent that I shall never return to the well.'

'And so, you scoundrel of a crocodile, just as Gangadatta the frog did not return to the well, I too shall never come to your home,' declared Raktamukha the monkey.

At this, the crocodile sighed and said, 'My friend, do not speak such harsh words. Please come home with me. Give me a chance to make up to you for my silly trick. I will sit here and starve myself to death unless you agree!'

At this the monkey grew even angrier. 'You idiot,' he cried. 'Do you think I am that long-eared fool, Lambakarna, that I will go into a place I know to be dangerous and get myself killed? He came and, seeing the might and power of the lion, he ran away. But fool that he was, he returned to the very same place and was killed.'

'Who was this Lambakarna, and how did he get himself killed?' asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of the donkey and the lion.

The Story of the Donkey and the Lion

In a certain forest, there lived a lion called Karalakesara. He had one attendant, a faithful jackal called Dhusara, who followed him everywhere he went. One day, the lion was severely wounded in a fight with a wild elephant. As a result of his injuries, he grew feeble and weak and could not hunt any more. As the days passed and the lion was unable to catch any prey, both he and his attendant, the jackal, began to starve. The jackal, unable to bear the pangs of hunger any more, said to the lion, 'Sire, I am so weak with hunger that I can barely walk. How, then, can I serve you?'

'If that is so, then go and search for an animal that I can kill even in my enfeebled state and bring him here to me,' replied the lion.

The jackal ran off to do as the lion asked, and soon he came to a small village on the outskirts of the forest. A donkey called Lambakarna was grazing on the sweet, fresh grass that grew outside the village by the riverbank. Dhusara, seeing the donkey, ran up to him and said, 'Dear Uncle, namaskar! I haven't seen you for a long time! And why have you grown so thin and weak?'

The donkey, pleased by the jackal's respectful greeting, replied, 'My dear nephew! How good to see you! What can I say? My master, the washerman, works me very hard. He barely gives me anything to eat, which is why I have to eat this dry and tasteless grass. How can you expect me to look strong and well-fed on such fare?'

'If that is so, Uncle, then come with me,' said the jackal. 'I know a meadow deep in the forest, watered by the river all year round, where grows grass as green as emerald. You can live in ease and comfort there and spend the rest of your days engaged in pleasant debate and discussion with me.'

'Ah nephew, your words are sweet indeed,' said the donkey. 'But I am a creature of the village and the field, the natural prey of the fierce animals that live in the forest. So what use is your meadow to me?'

'Ah, Uncle, do not worry, the meadow is under my protection and no other animal dares go there!' said the jackal. 'Besides,' he added slyly, 'three other she-donkeys live in that meadow. I rescued them just last week from their cruel masters. They are, all three, young and

beautiful, and have asked me to find them a husband. When I saw you, I knew that you would be the perfect match for them. It is for them that I want to take you there.'

The donkey, greatly flattered by the jackal's words, said, 'Nephew, if that is so, then let us leave at once for your meadow. I would not like to keep the young ladies waiting!'

The jackal at once led the donkey into the forest, where his master, the lion, was waiting. The lion, seeing the donkey approach, gave a loud roar; but he was weak with hunger and his injuries and by the time he could struggle to his feet, the donkey, alarmed, had turned tail and run away. The lion lunged with his mighty paws at the fleeing donkey, but missed; the donkey, terrified by the lion's bloodshot eyes and sharp, curving teeth, ran away as fast as he could.

The jackal, watching the donkey run away, turned angrily upon the lion. 'So is that how you kill your prey? You could not even catch that donkey! No wonder the elephant defeated you so easily!'

The poor lion was deeply embarrassed. 'I wasn't ready for the donkey, otherwise he would never have got away!' he complained.

'In that case, I will bring him to you one more time,' said the jackal. 'This time, be ready.'

'How will you bring him here again?' asked the lion astonished. 'He has now seen me, and barely escaped with his life. I am sure he won't come back again. Maybe you should look for another animal.'

'Leave it to me,' said the jackal. 'I will bring him back to you again.'

The jackal set off in search of the donkey and found him in his old spot outside the village, grazing on the fresh grass by the river. Seeing the jackal, the donkey called out, 'Hey there, nephew! That was a fine meadow you led me to! I was nearly killed! Tell me, what was that fierce creature that jumped at me? I have never seen an animal like that one before!'

'Why, Uncle, couldn't you tell? That was one of the female donkeys I had told you about!' declared the jackal. 'She took one look at you and fell so deeply in love with you that she could not bear to be apart for even a second more! That is why she came running to you. But you turned around and fled. Even then she tried to stop you, but you would not stay. She has sent me to find you and says that if you do not return, she will starve herself to death. So please, Uncle, for her sake, come back to the forest.'

The donkey was completely taken in by the jackal's words and followed him once more into the forest. This time the lion was ready and killed the donkey with a single bite of his massive jaws.

‘And that is why I say, I will not go with you,’ said Raktamukha the monkey. ‘I am not a fool like Lambakarna the donkey who, despite having seen the danger, walked straight back into it and died.’ He chattered angrily at the crocodile. ‘And you, you are such a fool yourself,’ he continued scornfully. ‘You played a nasty trick on me, and had me well and truly in your power, but then ruined your own purpose by stupidly telling me the truth. It has been said, and rightly so, that the man who, forgetting his own self-interest, speaks the truth out of stupidity and stupidity alone, will destroy his own dreams, as did the potter, Yudhishthira.’

‘Oh, and how did he do that?’ asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of Yudhishthira the potter.

The Story of Yudhishthira the Potter

In a certain town there lived a potter called Yudhishthira. One evening he had had too much to drink. Staggering home unsteadily in the dark, he tripped over a broken pot in his courtyard and fell, hitting his head upon the jagged edge of the pot. The edge was sharp and hard, and made a deep gash in his forehead. Bleeding profusely, but too drunk to care, he dragged himself to bed and fell asleep. The wound, untended, became infected, and when after weeks and weeks it finally healed, it left a large and frightening scar upon his forehead.

A few years later, drought and famine hit the land. Hungry and starving, the potter left the town and went away to a neighbouring kingdom where he found work as a guard in the king's palace.

One day, the king in passing noticed the hideous scar upon his new guard's forehead. 'He must surely have received that scar in battle,' thought the king. 'A man who receives a blow upon his forehead is a man who fights the enemy face to face and does not run away. What a great hero this man must be!' The king, convinced that the potter was a great warrior, ordered that he be given a place of honour amongst the princes. Though the others knew that the potter did not deserve the king's favour, there was nothing they could do for they were all afraid of the king.

Now it so happened that the king decided to hold a great tournament to honour his soldiers. The men were dressed in armour, the elephants and horses in bright and shining battle gear. In the midst of the bustle and the preparation, the king went up to the potter and said, 'O great hero, what is your name? Where do you come from? And in which battle did you get this scar that has marked your face with valour forever?'

'Sire,' replied the humble potter. 'My name is Yudhishthira. I am no warrior, but a potter by profession. This scar upon my forehead is not a battle wound, but a wound I received when I fell, blind drunk, upon the shards of a broken pot. It did not heal well, and so has marked my face forever.'

The king, deeply embarrassed by his mistake, ordered his guards to throw the potter out. 'See how this fellow has deceived me all these

months, pretending to be a warrior when he is only a potter!' he declared. 'Throw him out of the palace and make sure he never returns.'

As the guards grabbed the potter and began to lead him away, he called out to the king and said, 'Sire, do not send me away like this! Give me a chance to show you how well I can fight.'

'I am sure you are brave and learned and wise and skilled at many things,' said the king, 'but remember that in the family in which you were born, they do not hunt elephants,' replied the king.

'And what does that mean?' asked the potter.

So the king told him the story of the jackal who was adopted by a lioness.

The Story of the Jackal Who Was Adopted by a Lioness

In a certain forest, there lived a lion and a lioness. Once, the lioness gave birth to two beautiful little cubs. The lion and the lioness loved their sons dearly, and while the mother would spend her time looking after them and making sure they were safe, the father would go out in the forest to hunt. Each day he would bring home some animal or the other for his wife to eat.

One day, the lion could not catch any prey. As the sun began to set, he set off homewards, tired and disappointed. On the way he saw a baby jackal that had strayed from his mother. The lion, unwilling to kill a baby, gently picked up the little jackal in his great big teeth and taking him home, handed him to his wife.

'Husband, have you brought me anything to eat today?' asked the lioness.

The lion shook his head. 'Beloved, except for this little jackal, I saw no animals today. I did not have the heart to kill such a young one, so I have brought him home to you. If you are hungry, why don't you eat him? He will be good enough for a snack for now, and tomorrow morning I will go out again to hunt.'

'Husband, when even you did not have the heart to kill him, how then do you think I could want to eat him? No, I will not kill him either. Instead, from today he will be my third son and stay here with us in safety and comfort.'

And so the little jackal became part of the lion family, and he and the two lion cubs began to grow up together. Neither the cubs nor the little jackal were aware of any difference between them, and loved each other like brothers.

One day, a huge elephant came rampaging through the forest. The two young lions prepared to attack him, but the jackal was afraid. 'Brothers, what are you thinking?' he cried. 'That elephant is big enough and strong enough to kill both of you! It would be foolish to attack him!' And turning tail, the jackal fled back to their den. The two lion cubs, seeing the jackal so afraid, also lost their courage and

ran back to their den with him.

That evening, when the lion came home, the two young cubs told him all about the huge elephant they had seen. ‘But our brother was afraid of him and ran away,’ they added with a laugh.

The jackal did not like the cubs laughing at him. Furious, he turned upon them, snarling and hissing and calling them rude names. Their mother, the lioness, interceded, and taking her adopted son aside, reprimanded him gently. ‘You should not speak like that to them, for they are your brothers and younger than you,’ she said.

The jackal grew even angrier at this. ‘How dare they laugh at me?’ he cried. ‘I am stronger than them, braver than them, smarter than them, more handsome than them, and still they make fun of me! I will not rest till I have killed them both!’

The lioness, who loved the jackal as her own, tried to calm him down. ‘Yes, my son, you are strong and brave and clever and handsome, but in the family in which you were born, they do not hunt elephants,’ she said. Deciding to tell him the truth, she continued, ‘My child, you are actually the son of a jackal. We found you lost and alone in the forest, and taking pity on you we decided to bring you up as one of our own. My sons, the lion cubs, are still young and do not realize that you are a jackal. You would do well to go away, back to your own kind, before they find out and kill you.’

The jackal trembled with fear at her words. Taking her advice, he ran away as fast as he could. Ultimately, he joined a pack of jackals, and forgetting the lions, learnt to live with his own kind as one of them.

‘And so, concluded the king, ‘though I am sure you are brave and learned and wise and skilled at many things, don’t forget that you are only a potter. Like the lion cubs, my warriors will never accept you as one of their own, and it is best you go away as quickly as you can and join your own kind, lest you be killed.’

At this the potter ran away from there as quickly as had the jackal.

‘And as for you,’ continued Raktamukha the monkey, angrily berating the crocodile, ‘you are a fraud and as stupid as the potter. You betrayed our friendship and plotted with your wife to kill me. You would have succeeded if you had but known how to keep your mouth shut. Silence is often the way to success. Have you not heard that

Though the secret was carefully guarded

And he was terrifying to behold
The donkey in the tiger's skin
Was killed as soon as he brayed.'

'And how did that happen?' asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of the donkey in the tiger's skin.

The Story of the Donkey in the Tiger's Skin

In a certain town there lived a washerman called Shuddhapata. He owned a little donkey, who helped him carry the clothes to and fro from the river. The washerman was very poor, and could not give his donkey enough grass or fodder to eat. As a result, the poor donkey had grown thin and weak.

The way to the river lay through a dense forest. One morning, on his way to the river with his little donkey, the washerman saw a dead tiger lying in the grass. 'This is my lucky day,' he thought, as he quickly skinned the tiger. 'I can wrap this tiger skin around my poor, starving donkey and let him loose in the fields at night. The farmers will mistake him for a tiger and will be too scared to chase him away, and my poor donkey will be able to eat his fill of their crops and never go hungry again.'

The washerman carried out his plan that very night. Wrapping the tiger skin around the donkey, he let him lose in a field of millet. The donkey ate as much of the millet as he could, and just before dawn, the washerman led him home again. Pleased by the success of his plan, the washerman led his donkey to a field of millet every night, and every morning, before the light of the sun could reveal the donkey for what he truly was, the washerman would lead him home. All went well for several nights, and very soon the donkey had put on weight and become sleek and plump.

One night, as the donkey was grazing in the fields, he heard another donkey braying in the distance. He immediately brayed back loudly. The farmers heard him and realized that the fierce tiger in their fields was just a silly donkey. They pelted him with stones and beat him with sticks till he died.

'And that is why I say,' said Raktamukha, 'that silence is often the way to success.'

Now as the crocodile and the monkey were talking, a crab sidled up to the crocodile and said, 'O Karalamukha, while you sit here talking, your wife, waiting for you to return, has died of grief.'

Hearing this, the crocodile began to weep and wail. 'What an

unlucky fellow I am,' he said. 'First I lose my friend, and then my wife as well. When one's luck fails, then such misfortunes happen—as they did to the fox in the woods.'

'Why, what misfortunes befell her?' asked the monkey.

So Karalamukha told him the story of the fox in the woods.

The Story of the Fox in the Woods

Once, a fox found a large chunk of fresh meat in the woods, perhaps left over from a tiger's kill. She took the meat in her mouth and set off for her den to feed her hungry pups.

On the way she passed a stream and saw that the water was full of fish. Suddenly a huge fish leaped out of the water and fell on to the riverbank. As the fish lay struggling and gasping in the grass, the fox dropped the chunk of meat in her mouth and rushed to grab the fish. But before she could reach it, the fish managed to flop back into the water.

The fox, disappointed, turned back to her chunk of meat—only to see a kite swoop down from the sky and carry it away before her eyes.

'So there was the fox, without the meat and without the fish—just as I am now without a friend and without a wife,' wailed Karalamukha.

Just then, another little water creature came up to the crocodile and said, 'O Karalamukha, while you sit here chatting, another crocodile has moved into your house. He is huge, much bigger than you.'

At this, Karalamukha began to wail and weep even louder. 'Now I have lost my house as well! It is true that misfortunes never come singly,' he wept. 'Oh what shall I do? Shall I fight this crocodile, or politely ask him to leave? Or should I threaten him, bribe him, or try to come to some agreement? Or—and this may be the best plan—should I ask my friend the monkey for advice?'

The crocodile called up to the monkey and said, 'My dear friend, a huge crocodile, much bigger than me, has moved into my house. Please tell me, what should I do to get him out?'

'How dare you ask me for advice?' replied Raktamukha angrily. 'You betrayed our friendship and tried to kill me because your wife wanted to eat my heart! And now you have the cheek to ask me for help? I will not waste my time with you. In any case, you are too stupid to take good advice even when you are given it, and everyone knows what happens to people who disregard wise counsel—they are quickly destroyed, as was the camel with the bell.'

'Why, what happened to the camel?' asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of the camel who had a bell around his neck.

The Story of the Camel Who Had a Bell around His Neck

In a certain town, there lived a chariot-maker called Ujjwalaka. Though he worked as hard as anyone else, he was poorer than all the other chariot-makers, carpenters and artisans in the town. 'This poverty will never leave me,' he thought in despair. 'My friends all have soaring mansions, while I still live in this poor hut.' Fed up of the daily struggle of trying to make ends meet, he decided to seek his fortune in other lands. Taking his wife aside, he said, 'Wife, no matter what I do, I cannot seem to earn enough money in this town. So I have decided to go to the next town and see what I can do there.' And saying goodbye to his wife and children, the chariot-maker set off on his journey.

Now, his path lay through a dense forest. As he made his way through the forest, he saw a camel sitting alone by the path. She was clearly lost, and what's more, she was in labour. The chariot-maker took pity on her. Giving up his plan to journey to another land, he led the poor camel back to his house. Asking his wife to look after her, he returned to the forest to gather tender young leaves and branches for the camel to eat. When he had gathered enough, he returned home and spread the leaves and branches before the camel, who gratefully munched her way through them. A few hours later, the camel gave birth to a beautiful little calf.

The chariot-maker took great care of the camel and her calf. When the calf was old enough to be weaned, he began to sell the camel's milk to the townspeople. He was soon earning more money by selling milk than he had ever earned as a chariot-maker. 'Why should I bother with my old profession when my new one is so profitable?' he thought. He gave up his old trade and used his savings to buy a herd of camels from Gujarat. He was now a wealthy man, and owned several camels and their calves. His favourite, though, was the first little calf whose mother he had rescued from the forest, and to distinguish him from the other young camels, he tied a tinkling bell around his neck.

The young camel loved his bell and would walk about proudly to make it jingle. Unfortunately, he grew quite conceited with it, and soon began to think himself better than the other camels. Each day the herd of camels would go into the forest to munch fresh new leaves and drink from the clear, sparkling stream that flowed through the trees. The young camel would go too, but considering himself too good for the others, he would hang back and follow at a proud distance.

The other camels would urge him to catch up. 'It is dangerous to be alone in the forest, especially with that jingling bell around your neck —you never know what fierce beast it may attract,' they would say. But the vain young camel would ignore them. He loved his jingling bell, and huh, he could take care of himself.

One day, a lion wandering the forest in search of prey heard the jingling of the camel's little bell. Curious, he followed the sound and saw the herd of young camels making their way to the stream for a drink. The lion knew he could not attack a whole herd and was about to turn away when he noticed that one of them was lagging behind the rest. This was, of course, the young camel with the bell. The lion waited patiently. Soon the other camels had drunk their fill and turned towards home. The young camel with the bell, as usual, refused to go back with them. The lion waited till the other camels had gone away. Now the young camel was quite alone. The lion waited no longer but pounced upon him and killed him with a single bite to his throat.

'And that is why I say,' concluded Raktamukha, 'that he who disregards good advice comes to a quick and unhappy end.'

Karalamukha heard the story and said, 'I know I have been a bad and ungrateful friend, but we have shared many things in the past. For the sake of that old friendship, please tell me what to do. After all, how noble is your compassion if you help only those who have been good to you? Those who are truly virtuous help even those who are evil or have harmed them.'

The crocodile's words hit home. 'You are right,' conceded Raktamukha. 'Listen to me then: go home and fight the crocodile who has taken possession of your house. For if you fight him, there can only be two outcomes—you will be killed, in which case you will die fighting for a just cause, or you will get your house back. In either case, your problem will be solved and you will receive the admiration of everyone around you. As the wise have counselled, in war,

Submit to the great
Use strategy against the valiant
Placate the weak with gifts
And fight your equals as an equal—
Which the clever jackal well knew.'

'Oh really, what did he do?' asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of the clever jackal.

The Story of the Clever Jackal

In a certain forest there lived a jackal called Mahachaturaka. One day, as he wandered through the trees in search of food, he saw an elephant lying dead upon the ground. The jackal went up to the carcass, and circled it cautiously; seeing that the elephant was really and truly dead, he settled down to make a meal of the carcass. But the elephant's hide was so thick that he could not bite through it with his weak jackal's teeth.

As he sat there and pondered the problem, a lion came strolling by, also in search of food. The jackal ran up to the lion at once, and throwing himself before him, cried in humble tones, 'Sire, I am your devoted servant. I have been keeping guard over this elephant carcass just for you. So please, Your Majesty, partake now of this royal feast.'

The lion, seeing the jackal so meek and humble, replied, 'My dear fellow, you do know that I don't eat any animal I have not killed myself. I am not in the habit of feeding off animals found lying dead in the forest. The virtuous do not give up their good habits even in times of want, so even though I am very hungry right now, I will not stoop to eat this elephant. Instead, I present this carcass to you—take it as a gift from me to you.' And so saying, the lion went loftily on his way.

Just then, a tiger came slinking through the underbrush. 'I got rid of one villain by pretending to be meek and humble,' thought the jackal, 'but now here comes another one! What shall I do with him? He is not arrogant like the lion, but he is valiant and honourable. He won't be placated by shows of meekness or offers of gifts. So I must use strategy to get rid of him!' The jackal then went up to the tiger and pretending to shake with fright, he said, 'Oh Uncle, why have you come here, straight into the jaws of death? The lion who killed this elephant has gone down to the river for a drink, leaving me to guard his kill. He has ordered me to let him know the moment any tiger comes by, so he can return at once and kill him. A tiger once stole his kill from him, because of which he has vowed to rid this forest of tigers.'

The tiger trembled to hear this, and said to the jackal, 'My dear nephew, spare me my life. Don't tell the lion about me and let me go.

I will leave this place as fast as I can!' And so saying, the tiger ran away.

As soon as the tiger left, along came a cheetah. 'Hmm, this cheetah has sharp teeth, maybe I can get him to rip a hole in the elephant's hide,' thought the jackal. He went up to the cheetah and said, 'Hey nephew, where have you been? I haven't seen you around for a while. You look hungry. But you are my guest, so do come and help yourself to a bite out of this elephant carcass. The lion who killed it has left me to guard it. So I say, eat your fill of the elephant and run away before the lion returns.'

'If that is the case, Uncle, I would rather not touch this elephant,' said the cheetah, drawing back. 'I don't want the lion to kill me! I would rather skip this meal and live another day to enjoy the good things in this world. It is said, and wisely so, that we must eat only food which is worth eating, which we can digest, and which does us good in the long run. I cannot digest this elephant carcass and it will do me no good to take a bite out of it if the lion were to kill me for it!'

'O come, come, don't be such a coward,' chided the jackal. 'Eat with an easy mind. I will warn you well before the lion comes, and you can run away before he sees you.'

The cheetah allowed himself to be persuaded and going up to the carcass, began to gnaw and bite it. When the jackal saw that he had torn a hole through the elephant's thick hide, he cried out, 'Run, nephew, run! The lion is on his way back!'

Hearing this, the cheetah fled for his life.

The jackal looked with satisfaction at the hole the cheetah had made in the elephant's hide. He could finally get to the juicy flesh beneath. He had just settled down to his meal when another jackal came out of the trees. Mahachaturaka looked at the intruder, and saw that he was his equal in strength and size. He reminded himself of the following lines:

Submit to the great
Use strategy against the valiant
Placate the weak with gifts
And fight your equals as an equal.

Then, summoning up his courage, he threw himself at the second jackal and, biting and snapping, tore him from limb to limb.

Finally, having got rid of all competition, the jackal sat down to enjoy his meal and lived off the elephant carcass for many long and

happy days.

‘And that is why I say,’ said Raktamukha, ‘go and fight the crocodile who has taken over your house. He may be huge, but you are not little either! You are well matched in size and strength. Destroy him before he has a chance to settle in and put down roots. If he succeeds in doing that, he will destroy you. Besides, there is no happier place than home. You may decide to give up your home to the intruder, and go away to another land, but remember, in a foreign land, even your own kind are not your friends—as the dog soon found out.’

‘Oh, and how was that?’ asked the crocodile.

So Raktamukha told him the story of the dog in a foreign land.

The Story of the Dog in a Foreign Land

In a certain town, there lived a dog called Chitranga. Once, that town was hit by a severe drought. Soon there was nothing left to eat, and birds, animals and people began to die of hunger. Chitranga, thin and starving, decided to leave for another land where he hoped to find more food.

After travelling for a few days, he reached another town in a foreign kingdom. There, food was available in plenty, and the birds and animals were sleek and plump. Chitranga, prowling through the town for food, saw the open doorway of a house. He sneaked in, and finding his way to the kitchen, ate as much as his belly could hold. He would do this every day—the people who lived in that house were rather careless and never shut their door properly, nor was there ever anyone around to chase Chitranga away. Soon Chitranga, too, grew sleek and fat.

He could have been perfectly happy with this life except for the other dogs in the town. Every day, they would lie in wait for him outside the door of the house, and when Chitranga would come out, well-fed and satisfied, they would jump upon him and bite him and scratch him.

Chitranga tolerated this for a while because of the food, but then one day it became more than he could bear. 'This is intolerable,' he said to himself. 'It is better to be poor and starving in my own land than a well-fed stranger in a foreign land and bear insults every day. I may be hungry in my own home, but at least I can live in peace there.' Thinking thus, Chitranga returned to his own town.

When his friends and relatives realized that he had returned, they flocked to see him, full of eager questions. 'How was the foreign town? Is it big, bigger than ours? Is it very beautiful? Was there a lot of food there?' they asked.

'Well,' replied Chitranga, 'There was wealth and prosperity there, and all kinds of conveniences. People left their doors open so I could sneak into their kitchens and help myself to as much food as I wanted. Everything was wonderful in that foreign land—except even my own kind were not my friends.'

The monkey, Raktamukha, stopped speaking, his story over. Karalamukha the crocodile had been listening with great attention. ‘Hmm,’ said he, thinking over the advice his friend had given. Deciding that his friend was right, and making up his mind to fight the intruder crocodile, he thanked the monkey for his help and returned home. Determined to get his house back, he fought the usurper with great courage and killed him. He got back his home and lived there in peace till the end of his days.

‘And so ends the fourth part of your lessons,’ concluded Vishnusharma.

Part 5

Unconsidered Actions

Vishnusharma said to the three princes, 'I shall now commence the fifth part of your lessons, which deals with action undertaken without consideration. No one should do anything without first understanding what they are about to do, examining the practical aspects of their action, learning as much as they can about what is entailed and may be required, and thinking through the consequences of their deed—or they may find themselves in a situation similar to that of the foolish barber. Listen now, to the story of what happened to him.'

The Story of the Foolish Barber

It has been heard that in a kingdom in the south, there was a city called Pataliputra, in which lived a merchant called Manibhadra. He had been a rich man once, and though he had always led a virtuous and pious life, a cruel twist of fate had deprived him of all his wealth. He did not find poverty easy, and railed against the daily inconveniences and humiliations that it brought.

'I hate being poor,' he thought bitterly. 'Poverty makes all other qualities useless. A man may be kind and courteous and honest, but once he has lost his money, no one respects him any more. Status, pleasure and accomplishments—all desert him the moment he loses his wealth. Poverty destroys the wisdom even of the wise, as they struggle daily with the worries of running a household. In worrying over providing food for his family, and tussling with the prices of grain and ghee, even the most intellectual men lose their intelligence. A poor man's house is as empty as a sky without stars, as desolate as a dried-up pond and as dismal as a cremation ghat. A poor man is never given any respect, no matter how accomplished or good he may be. But a rich man—now he can get away with anything! Even his most heinous acts are forgiven. See how the sea roars or the clouds thunder, and no one complains or criticizes! A life of poverty is pointless—it is better to starve myself to death than continue to live a poor man!'

Thinking such bitter and angry thoughts, Manibhadra fell asleep, and as he slept he had a strange dream. In his dream, a naked Jain monk came up to him and said, 'Why are you sad, Manibhadra? My name is Padmanidhi, and I am the treasure your ancestors collected and which now rightly belongs to you. Tomorrow morning, I will come to your house in this same form in which you see me now. Hit me on the head with a stout stick, and I will turn into a pile of gold coins. This pile of gold will never be exhausted, no matter how much you spend, so that you will remain a rich man till the end of your days.'

When Manibhadra woke up, he remembered his strange dream. 'Can it be that my dream will come true?' he wondered. Then, shaking his head, he dismissed it. 'No, no, of course not. It cannot come true. It

was only a dream, and an improbable one at that,' he said. 'I worry about money all the time, and I was thinking about it just before I fell asleep. No doubt that is why I had this peculiar dream.' Just then, there came a knock at his door. It was the barber, who had come to shave him. Manibhadra let the barber in, and was about to shut the door when who should he see walking up to his house but the very same naked monk he had seen in his dream!

The merchant was delighted to see the monk, and picking up a stout stick that stood by the door, he struck him a firm blow on the top of his head. The monk turned at once into a shower of gold coins and precious gems which fell on to the floor in a great pile. The merchant gathered up the treasure and hid it in a secret chamber of his house. Taking the barber aside, and thrusting a bag of gold coins into his hand, he said, 'Friend, do not tell anyone what you saw just now. This must remain a secret. Do you understand?' The barber, delighted with his bag of coins, nodded faithfully and promised to keep the merchant's secret.

That night, when the barber returned home, he thought over what he had seen. 'It must be that these naked monks turn into piles of gold when they are hit on the head. So I will invite some of them home tomorrow morning and hit them on the head so that I can also get a pile of gold and jewels like the merchant.'

The very next morning, the barber went to the Jain monastery, and after pretending to pray, and chanting verses in praise of the monks, he went to the chief monk to seek his blessings. After the monk had blessed him, the barber said, 'When you go out to seek alms today, turn your steps towards my house and come and dine with me. Bring the other monks with you as well.'

The monk, annoyed, replied, 'Do you not know that we are Jain ascetics? We live on the alms we get and do not accept invitations to dine at anyone's home.'

'But, oh muni,' said the barber slyly, 'I have saved some beautiful pieces of cloth that you can take to wrap your books of learning in, and I have saved up money for scribes to make beautiful copies of these books.'

The chief monk could not resist this offer, and agreed to visit the barber's house with some of the others. How true it is that even such a one as a Jain muni, who has given up the world, wanders naked across the earth and eats out of his cupped hands, may be moved by desire!

The barber ran home and placed a big wooden stick behind his

door. He then stood waiting for the monks to arrive. As soon as all the monks were inside, he locked the doors of his house and, picking up the stick, began beating his guests about the head. The monks began to scream and shout as loudly as they could so that their cries reached the watchmen on duty at the city gates. ‘What is that frightful howling?’ cried the chief watchman, and ran with his men towards the noise.

They broke down the door of the barber’s house, and rescued the poor monks, some of whom had blood pouring down their faces. The watchmen arrested the barber and hauled him to the judges. ‘Why did you beat up the monks in this cruel and wicked manner?’ asked the judges.

‘I saw the merchant do it,’ cried the barber. ‘I saw him kill a monk!’

The judges ordered that the merchant be fetched before them. ‘Did you kill a monk?’ asked the judges severely of the merchant when he appeared.

Manibhadra then told the judges the whole story—of his dream, the appearance of Padmanidhi, and how the monk turned into a pile of gold and precious stones. At this the judges let the merchant go, but declared the barber guilty and sentenced him to a long, long time in prison.

When the barber had been taken away, the judges shook their heads and said,

Let no man in our town behave as
foolishly as did the barber
Who pursued a course of action
He had not fully understood,
Nor sufficiently investigated,
And the consequences of which
He had considered not at all.

Give every action due consideration
Think carefully, and learn all you can about a situation
Do not jump to conclusions without full information
Or cruel remorse will be your lot
As happened in the case of the brahmin’s wife and the mongoose.

‘Oh, and how was that?’ asked Manibhadra.

So the judges told him the story of the brahmin’s wife and the

mongoose.

The Story of the Brahmin's Wife and the Mongoose

In a certain town, there lived a brahmin called Devasharma. One day, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. The same day, a female mongoose also gave birth to a little pup, but died in the process. The brahmin's wife saw the orphaned little pup, and being a kind-hearted woman, she picked up the tiny creature and brought him home with her. She looked after the baby mongoose as tenderly as she looked after her own son. The mongoose, too, looked upon the human family as his own.

But though the brahmin's wife loved the little mongoose, she did not trust it. 'After all, it *is* a mongoose, an animal that by nature preys on others. What if it turns upon my little son one day and hurts him?' she would worry.

One day, she laid her baby to sleep in his cradle, and picking up her water pot, went off to the well to fetch some water. Before she left, she said to her husband, 'I am going down to the well. While I am gone, keep an eye on our son and make sure the mongoose does not harm him.' But the brahmin, who was keen to collect the day's alms, paid no heed to his wife's words and left the house as soon as she did.

It so happened that while both the brahmin and his wife were away, a huge black cobra slithered into the house. The mongoose recognized the cobra as a dangerous creature, and determined to protect his baby brother, attacked the snake. The snake, huge though it was, was no match for the mongoose—the mongoose killed the snake and tore it into little pieces.

Just then the brahmin's wife returned from the well. The mongoose, glad to hear the sound of her footsteps, ran to welcome her. He wanted to show her how well he had protected his little brother. But the mother, seeing the mongoose's mouth and snout covered in blood, screamed in panic, 'This evil creature has killed and eaten my son!' And she threw the heavy water pot at the poor mongoose, killing him instantly. Weeping and wailing, she went into the house and ran to her son's cradle—to see that her son lay sleeping peacefully, while on

the floor by his cradle lay the pieces of the dead cobra. She now realized what she had done. Overcome by grief and remorse at having killed the mongoose, she began to weep anew.

As she lay weeping on the bed, her husband, the brahmin, returned with the day's takings. 'Oh, you greedy man,' cried his wife. 'You did not listen to me! If you had waited till I returned, this would not have happened. Now I have killed this mongoose that was as a second son to us! Now suffer the grief of losing a child! Don't you know, excessive greed causes the wheel to spin upon your head!'

'And how would that be?' asked the brahmin, mystified.

So his wife told him the story of Chakradhara, the man with the wheel upon his head.

The Story of the Man with the Wheel upon His Head

In a town far away, there once lived four young men, good friends and all extremely poor. One day, the four friends sat talking amongst themselves.

'Poverty is a great curse,' said one.

'It is better to live in a forest full of wild animals, to sleep on the hard ground and wear clothes made of tree bark, than to live in this town in such abject poverty!' said another.

'No one likes a poor man!' said the third.

'It is time that we too made some money!' declared the fourth.

'And how shall we do that?' asked the first.

The four friends pondered the various ways in which money could be acquired.

'We can find jobs, work for the king.'

'Or we can teach.'

'Or we can become farmers and grow crops and sell them.'

'Or we can become bankers and moneylenders, and deal in the wealth of others to make our own.'

'Or we can become traders, and buy and sell goods.'

'Or we could travel, and seek our fortune in foreign lands.'

After some discussion, they decided that the last option was the best. And so, saying goodbye to their families and leaving behind their old, familiar town, the four friends set off into the world to seek their fortunes.

Soon they reached the city of Avanti, where flows the sacred Sipra river. They bathed in the river, and offered puja at the great temple there. As they stepped out of the temple, they saw coming towards them a yogi, called Bhairavananda. They greeted him with reverence, and accompanied him to his hermitage. When they arrived there, the yogi asked, 'Where are you coming from? Where are you going? And why?'

'We are going to seek our fortunes,' replied the four friends. 'We will travel till we find wealth or till we die—that is our firm resolve.

We have heard that you have great and magical powers. So please tell us what we must do to make money. We are willing to do whatever is required—to search in the bowels of the earth, to summon spirits and ghosts to help us, to recite spells in cremation grounds, or even offer human sacrifice. Just tell us what we must do to grow rich.'

Bhairavananda, moved by their earnest entreaties, took pity on them, and gave to each of them a quail feather and said, 'Walk northwards, towards the great Himalayas, and watch where your quail feathers fall. Wherever your feather touches the ground, there you will find your treasure. Dig it up, and, taking it with you, return home.'

The four friends took their quail feathers and set off towards the Himalayas. After weeks and weeks of walking, as they neared the mountains, the feather held by the first friend fell to the ground. He stopped and began to dig at the spot where the feather had fallen—to find a rich vein of copper. 'Look, the ground is all copper,' he cried. 'Let's take all the copper we can and return home!'

'What use is copper to us?' replied the others. 'Come, leave this, and let's carry on.'

But the first friend replied, 'I am quite content with my find, and will go back home with the copper. I do not wish to go any further, but the rest of you may do as you please.' And true to his word, he dug up as much copper as he could carry and returned home.

The other three friends then continued on their way. They had walked only a short distance when the feather held by the second friend floated to the ground. He stopped and began to dig the ground, to find a store of silver. 'Friends, look at all this silver,' he called. 'Let's take as much silver as we can carry and return home.'

But the other two replied, 'Friend, we first found a vein of copper, and now a store of silver. If we carry on, we are sure to find gold. You may be happy with the silver, but as for us, we will travel further.' And leaving their friend behind, the other two carried on walking. The second friend dug up as much of the silver as he could carry and returned home.

The remaining two friends had walked only a little way when the feather held by the third friend fell to the ground. Delighted, the third friend began to dig, and sure enough, it was gold that he found there. 'Come, take as much gold as you want and let us return home,' he said to the other. 'There is nothing more valuable than gold in the world and this will surely make us rich.'

But the fourth friend refused. 'You fool, you don't understand anything. We found copper, then silver, and now gold. The fourth

feather will definitely lead us to a mine of precious jewels! So don't waste your time here. Let's carry on walking.'

'No, I don't wish to go any further, I am quite content with the gold,' replied the third friend. 'But if you wish to carry on, then go ahead. I will stay here and wait for you.'

No matter how much he tried to convince him, the third friend would venture no further. So the last friend decided to carry on alone. He walked and walked. The sun beat down furiously upon him so that, tired and thirsty, he grew disoriented with the heat and wandered off the path the yogi had shown them. After a long time, when he thought he could walk no more and must surely collapse, he saw sitting upon the path a man drenched in blood, and upon whose head there whirled a large wheel.

'Who are you, and why do you sit here in this manner beneath this whirling wheel?' he asked, going up to the man. 'Is there any stream or well close by where I may quench my thirst?'

The words were barely out of his mouth when the whirling wheel left the strange man and flew up to fix itself on top of his own head. 'What is this? Why is this wheel now whirling upon my head?' he cried in fear.

'This is exactly how it came to settle upon my head,' replied the strange man. 'I became Chakradhara, the wheel-bearer, and now that title is yours.'

'Then tell me how I must rid myself of this wheel,' cried the fourth friend. 'It is causing me great pain.'

'Only when someone like you comes along with a magic quail feather in his hand and stops to speak to you as you did to me will the wheel leave your head as it did mine. It will then fix itself to the head of the newcomer, as it has fixed itself to yours. The newcomer will then become Chakradhara, and you will be free,' replied the man.

'How long did you have to sit here with the wheel upon your head?'

'Tell me, who is king on earth these days?'

'King Vatsa of the Bamboo Flute!' replied the fourth friend, who had now become Chakradhara.

'Hmm, I cannot tell you exactly how long I have been here, but it seems that thousands of years have passed since I came here, tormented by poverty and carrying a magic quail feather in my hand, just like you. Upon reaching here, I too had seen a fellow with this wheel upon his head, and, like you, I had gone up to him. As soon as I had spoken to him, the wheel had left him and affixed itself to me.'

'Sitting here, trapped under this wheel, how did you get food to eat

and water to drink?' asked Chakradhara in despair.

'Oh, you need not worry about all that,' replied the man. 'This trap has been set by Kubera, the god of wealth, to make sure that men bearing magic feathers do not find his treasure. Any man caught by this wheel feels neither hunger nor thirst, nor does he age nor fall ill. The only torment in his life is the wheel itself, whirling for eternity upon his head.' Then, thanking him for releasing him from the torture and saying goodbye, the man left.

Meanwhile, the third friend—let us call him Suvarnasiddhi, or 'he who has found gold', had been waiting by the hoard of gold. When some days had passed and the other had still not returned, he grew worried and set off in search of his friend. Following his friend's footprints, he soon came to the spot where Chakradhara sat, covered in his own blood, with the wheel whirling upon his head. Seeing his friend's state, his eyes filled with tears. 'My dear friend, what has happened to you? How come you are in this state?'

'Fate and bad luck,' replied Chakradhara, and told his friend all that had happened.

'Ah, my friend, I did tell you not to persist in going further, but you would not listen,' said Suvarnasiddhi sadly. 'You are educated and learned, but you lack discernment. It has been said, and truly so, that common sense is greater than book-learning. Learning without good sense is of no use—it leads only to death and destruction, as in the case of the learned men who had no common sense.'

'Oh, and how was that?' asked Chakradhara.

So Suvarnasiddhi told him the story of the learned men who had no common sense.

The Story of the Learned Men Who Had No Common Sense

In a certain town, there lived four young men. Of them, three were great scholars and had much learning, but they had no common sense. The fourth, who was called Subuddhi, had little learning, but he was clever in the ways of the world. One day, the four of them decided to set out together to see the world and seek their fortunes. They decided to travel east, towards the rising sun.

After walking for a while, the eldest amongst them said, 'Friends, the fourth one of us here is a fool. He has no scholarship and no learning. He can't hope to earn a king's favour or acquire any wealth only with common sense. I will not share any wealth I acquire with him. So it is best that he returns home.'

The second one agreed with the first and said, 'Yes, Mr Common Sense, go back home. You are no scholar, Subuddhi. You have no place here with us!'

The third friend disagreed and said gently, 'No, no, this is not right. We have been friends since childhood. Let Subuddhi come with us. And how does it matter if we give him a part of the wealth we acquire? Let him have a share. After all, it is only the narrow-minded and mean who say, "This is mine; that is yours." The generous and large-hearted make no such distinctions.' The others made no more objections, and the four friends continued on their way.

Their path lay through a dense forest, and as they made their way through the trees, they came across a pile of bones upon the forest floor. 'Aha, here's a chance to see how much we really know,' remarked one, gazing at the bones. 'These are the bones of a dead animal. I will gather them together, and then let us see if we can bring this creature back to life.' And so saying, he sorted the bones and assembled them into a skeleton.

The second scholar now stepped forward and covered the skeleton with muscle, blood, flesh and skin.

The third scholar stepped forward and was about to breathe life into it when Subuddhi stopped him and said, 'Friend, you do realize that

this dead creature you have recreated is a ferocious lion? If you should bring it back to life, it will kill all of us.'

'You fool! I cannot deny what I know! How can I not use the skill that I possess? I will give life to this lion, no matter what you say!' replied the third man indignantly.

'All right then, do as you wish—but wait a little, let me first climb this tree nearby!' replied Subuddhi, and scrambled up the tallest tree he could see.

As soon as Subuddhi was safely up the tree, the third scholar brought the lion back to life. The lion rose up with a mighty roar and, seeing the three men in front of him, killed them instantly. Subuddhi waited till the lion had left, and then climbing quickly down from the tree, made his way home as fast as he could.

'And that is why I say,' said Suvarnasiddhi, 'that common sense is more important than learning. You too, Chakradhara, for all your learning and knowledge, had no common sense. That is why you are in this mess.'

'Oh no, your reasoning here is faulty,' replied Chakradhara. 'I am in this mess not because of my lack of good sense, but because fate was against me. Even those with great good sense can die if fate turns against them. And if fate is on their side, even those with little wit and understanding can survive and prosper. So it was with the fishes and the frog.'

'Oh, and what happened to them?' asked Suvarnasiddhi.

So Chakradhara told him the story of the two fishes and the frog.

The Story of the Two Fishes and the Frog

In a certain pond there lived two fishes called Shatabuddhi and Sahastrabuddhi. They had made friends with a frog called Ekabuddhi. The fishes were as intelligent and as discerning as their names proclaimed them to be. The frog, too, lived up to his name and made few pretensions to any practical wisdom. The three friends enjoyed each other's company greatly, and every evening, they would sit at the water's edge and talk of this and that.

One evening, as they sat talking, a group of fishermen passed by, carrying their nets and their catch of fish upon their heads. As they went by, they looked at the pond and said to each other, 'We haven't fished here before. This pond is full of fish and the water is quite shallow too. We shall come here first thing tomorrow morning.' And determining to return at dawn, the fishermen went on their way.

At this, the friends looked at each other in concern. 'Friends, did you hear what the fishermen said?' asked the frog. 'Under these circumstances, what do you think we should do? Should we stay here? Or should we run away?'

'Friend, don't be afraid of their words, it is only talk,' replied Sahastrabuddhi with a laugh. 'One must not be frightened by mere words. Look, the wishes of evil people are never fulfilled, for if they were, this world would have ended long ago. Besides, I don't think they will really come, and even if they do, I will protect you and keep you safe, for I know a thousand ways to outwit them in the water.'

'You are right, my friend,' agreed Shatabuddhi, 'for you are truly as intelligent as your name declares. After all, there is no problem that an intelligent man's wit cannot solve, no darkness it cannot penetrate.' Turning to the frog, he continued, 'Do not be afraid my friend. We should not leave our homes only because of some words uttered by a few fishermen in passing. Besides, I am here, and with all my great good sense, I will surely outwit the fishermen.'

The frog looked at the two fishes and replied, 'Friends, I am not as smart as you, nor do I have your discernment in worldly matters. But my limited intelligence tells me that it is dangerous to stay here any longer. So I have decided to leave this pond at once, taking my wife

with me.' The frog hopped away and, that very night, left the pond with his wife and took refuge in a nearby well.

The next morning, the fishermen arrived with their nets, and caught all the water creatures that lived in the pond. Fishes, turtles, frogs and crabs—all were caught in their nets. Shatabuddhi and Sahastrabuddhi tried everything they knew to elude the fishermen and evade their nets and traps, but, in the end, they too were caught and killed, along with their wives, their children and their relatives.

As the sun began to set, the fishermen, greatly satisfied with their haul, turned to return to their village. One of the fishermen carried Shatabuddhi, who had been a large and heavy fish, upon his head, while another carried Sahastrabuddhi, who had been a long fish, upon a string slung over his shoulders.

The frog, sitting at the edge of the well, saw the fishermen go by with their catch. 'Beloved wife, look,' he called. 'There, upon that fisherman's head is Shatabuddhi, and there, look, slung on the other man's shoulder, is Sahastrabuddhi! There go those two clever fishes, as dead as can be, while I am living it up here in the clear waters of this well.'

'And that is why I say,' concluded Chakradhara, 'that if fate turns against you, no amount of discernment or intelligence can help you.'

'Even so, is it wise to disregard a friend's advice?' asked Suvarnasiddhi. 'I tried to stop you, but what could I do? You were driven by greed, and so arrogant and opinionated, that you would not listen to me. As it has been said and truly so,

You would not stop your singing, Uncle
Though I begged you not to bray
So now around your neck, dear Uncle
Hangs your just reward!'

'And how is that?' asked Chakradhara.

So Suvarnasiddhi told him the story of the singing donkey.

The Story of the Singing Donkey

There once lived a donkey called Uddhata. All day long he worked for his master, the washerman, carrying heavy bundles of dirty and washed clothes to and from the river. At night, the washerman would set him loose, and he would wander freely across the fields. And every morning, as the sun rose over the trees, he would return to the washerman's house. He dared not be late returning—because what if his master beat him, or worse, kept him tied up at night so he could not roam free under the stars?

One night, as he wandered across the fields, he ran into a jackal. The two animals began talking, and very soon had struck up a firm friendship. They began to spend the nights together, wandering from field to field. The donkey, who was big and strong, would break through the hedges, and the jackal would follow. The two friends would stuff themselves on the tender young cucumbers that grew in the fields, and once they had eaten as much as they could, each would return to his own home. This became their nightly routine.

One starlit night, as the two stood in the middle of a cucumber field, the donkey said to the jackal, 'Nephew, look how clear and bright is the night. Seeing its beauty, I feel like singing. Tell me now, which raga shall I sing?'

'Uncle, why do you wish to invite trouble?' asked the jackal, alarmed. 'We have come here only to steal the farmers' crops, and as you well know, thieves and lovers should not draw attention to themselves. Your voice is harsh, and carries a long away across the fields. If you sing, the farmers will hear you, and then who knows what will happen? They may beat you, or even kill you. So it is best to remain silent.'

The donkey was greatly offended at the jackal's words. 'You are a wild animal, living in the forest. That is why you know nothing about the pleasure of fine singing on a moonlit night!' retorted the donkey.

'But, Uncle, you do not know how to sing,' protested the jackal. 'All you can do is bray, and your braying is sure to wake up the farmers and bring them running here. Why bring trouble upon yourself?'

'You are a fool to think I cannot sing!' exclaimed the donkey. 'I

know all there is to know about music. Now listen as I explain it to you—there are seven notes and three scales, twenty-one modulations and forty-nine measures, and three moods and tempos. There are nine emotions that music expresses, and ragas and raginis appropriate for each season, mood and moment. Gods and men alike declare music to be the highest bliss. Now do you see how much I know about music? How, then, can you stop me from singing?'

'All right, Uncle,' said the jackal, 'if you must sing, then I will hide by the hedge and keep a lookout for the farmers.' And the jackal ran off to hide in the shadows by the hedge.

The donkey raised his head and began to bray. The racket woke up the farmers, who picked up their sticks and came running. When they saw the donkey standing in the middle of their cucumber crop, they shouted and yelled and beat him with their sticks till the poor animal fell to the ground. Then, picking up a millstone, they tied it round his neck. Leaving the poor donkey lying on the ground, the farmers went home. The donkey lay there for a while, then recovering, stood up shakily, his neck and head weighed down by the millstone. He crashed unsteadily through the hedge and went unhappily home.

The jackal, who had been watching from the shelter of the hedge, shook his head and muttered, 'You would not listen to advice, Uncle. So now you have your reward, a millstone around your neck!'

'And in the same way, you would not listen to me,' said Suvarnasiddhi. 'Though I begged you not to go any further, you continued.'

'You are right, my friend,' admitted Chakradhara sadly. 'Someone has rightly said that he who has no wit of his own, nor listens to a friend's advice, ends up like Mantharaka the weaver.'

'Why, what happened to him?' asked Suvarnasiddhi.

So Chakradhara told him the story of the weaver and the yaksha.

The Story of the Weaver and the Yaksha

In a certain town, there lived a weaver called Mantharaka. One day, as he sat working at his loom, the wooden frame of the loom broke. Picking up an axe, he set off to cut some wood to repair his loom. He wandered here and there, looking for a suitable tree. At last he reached the seashore, and saw growing there a rosewood tree. 'This tree is big and tall, and it will give me enough wood to repair my loom and make as many tools as I will ever need,' he declared, and prepared to cut down the tree.

Now, in that tree lived a yaksha. (Yakshas, as you know, are semi-divine beings who care for the trees and forests and gardens in the world; they often live in the trees they look after). When he saw the weaver raise his axe to strike the tree, he called out, 'Stop! Do not hurt this tree. This tree is my home. Soothed by the ocean breeze, I live here in peace and happiness.'

The weaver replied, 'Sir, I need wood to repair my loom. Otherwise, I will not be able to weave any cloth and my whole family will starve to death. I must cut this tree.'

'Spare this tree,' said the yaksha, 'and in return, ask of me any boon that you want and I will grant it.'

'Well, in that case,' said the weaver putting down his axe, 'I need to return home to discuss this with my friends and my wife. I will then come back to you with my request.'

'All right,' agreed the yaksha.

The delighted weaver set off for home. As he neared his town, he saw his friend, the barber, coming towards him. Hurrying up to the barber, he said, 'Friend, I met a yaksha by the seashore. He has promised to grant me any boon that I demand. So tell me, what should I ask of him? I have hurried here to seek your advice.'

'If that is so, then ask for a kingdom,' replied the barber. 'That way, you will become king and I your prime minister, and together we will rule the land and enjoy all the pleasures of this world.'

'What a wonderful idea,' exclaimed the weaver. 'Now let me go home and ask my wife what she thinks. I never do anything without first consulting her.' Taking leave of his friend, the weaver hurried

home to his wife.

'Beloved,' he cried, taking her in his arms, 'I met a yaksha by the seashore. He has promised to grant me any boon that I demand. So tell me, what should I ask for? My friend, the barber, says that I should ask for a kingdom and become king. But I want to know what you think, and have come home to seek your advice.'

'Husband, do not listen to the barber. His advice is unsound. Being king is difficult and troublesome. A king has to worry about so many things—he has to look after his people, administer the kingdom, worry about flood and famine, battles and treaties, armies and enemies, peace and war and diplomacy. A king can never sleep in peace, for even his dearest friends and closest family may plot to kill him for his crown. So what is the point of asking the yaksha for a kingdom?'

'You are right, beloved wife,' said the weaver. 'So tell me then, what should I ask for?'

'Well, you weave one piece of cloth a day, and all our needs are met through the sale of that piece of cloth,' said the wife. 'So why don't you ask the yaksha for an extra pair of hands and another head? That way you will be able to weave two pieces of cloth a day. The money you get by selling the first piece will continue to give us enough for our expenses, while the money from the second piece of cloth will give us a little bit extra—we can use that additional money to enjoy life's luxuries.'

'Now, that is indeed a wonderful idea,' said the weaver, greatly impressed by his wife's logic. He ran back to the seashore where the yaksha stood waiting and said, 'Sir, please give me an extra pair of hands and another head so I can weave another piece of cloth every day!' No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the yaksha had granted his wish.

The weaver set off for home, proudly waving his four arms and looking about him with his two heads. But when the townspeople saw him, they did not recognize him. 'Look, look, a monster!' they cried and rushed at him with sticks and stones, and beat him till he died.

'And that is why I say, that one who has no wit of his own nor listens to his friends meets a fate similar to that of Mantharaka the weaver,' said Chakradhara. 'Besides,' he continued sadly, 'the man who is ensnared by the imp of unattainable and unreasonable desires becomes an object of ridicule and ends up on the floor covered in flour, as did Somasharma's father.'

‘Why, what happened to him?’ asked Suvarnasiddhi.
So Chakradhara told him the story of Somasharma’s father.

The Story of Somasharma's Father

In a certain town, there lived a miserly brahmin. Each day he would beg for alms in the town, collecting grain and flour for his meal. He would eat part of what he received, and store away a portion of the flour in an earthen pot that he had hung from the ceiling. Every night, he would lie upon his bed and gaze at his pot of hoarded flour till he fell asleep.

One night, he said to himself, 'The day will come when this pot will be filled to the top with flour. Then famine will strike the land, there will be no food to be had, and I will sell my pot of flour for a hundred silver coins. With the hundred coins I will buy two goats, who will give birth to a kid every six months. Very soon, I will have a flock of goats. I will sell the goats and buy some cows, and when the cows begin to calve, I will sell the cows and buy some buffaloes, then sell the buffaloes and buy some mares. The mares will give birth to foals, and very soon I will have a stable full of horses. I will sell the horses for a fortune in gold, with which I will build myself a grand house with several courtyards. Then one day, a rich man will come up to me and offer me the hand of his beautiful daughter in marriage. I will marry her and soon we will have a son. I will name him Somasharma. Somasharma will learn how to crawl, and one day I will sit with a book in my lap in the garden behind the stables. Somasharma will see me, and, wriggling out of his mother's arms, will crawl towards me. But he will go too close to the horses. I will shout to his mother to pick him up, but she will be busy with her chores, and will not hear me. I will then spring forward to save my son, thus . . .' And he leapt out of bed, knocking his shoulder against the pot of flour hanging from the ceiling above him.

The brahmin fell on to the floor with a thump. As he watched, helpless, the pot of flour overturned and fell upon his head, covering him from head to toe in flour and shattering into a million pieces, together with his impossible and impractical dreams.

'And that is how, by yearning for the impossible, Somasharma's father ended up on the floor covered in flour,' concluded Chakradhara.

Suvarnasiddhi nodded. ‘But it is not your fault that you are in this difficult situation,’ he said. ‘Men, when they fall prey to greed and act without thinking of the consequences of their actions, often find themselves in trouble, as did King Chandra.’

‘Oh, and what happened to him?’ asked Chakradhara.

So Suvarnasiddhi told him the story of King Chandra.

The Story of King Chandra

Once, in a kingdom far away, there ruled a king called Chandra. His son, the prince, loved to play with monkeys, and for his entertainment, the king kept a troop of monkeys. The animals were fed the choicest delicacies by the prince and lived a life of ease and luxury. The chief of this troop was a wise and learned old monkey, well versed in the ways of the world.

Now the king also kept a herd of sheep. One of them, a huge ram, was somewhat of a glutton. He would steal into the royal kitchens whenever he could and eat up whatever food he would find there. The cooks were fed up of him, and whenever he appeared, they would hit him with whatever lay closest to hand. Sticks, earthenware, copper pots and big brass plates—they would hurl them all at the ram to chase him away.

When the chief of the monkeys saw this, he grew worried. 'What if they throw a burning stick at him one day?' he thought. 'The ram's woolly fleece will surely catch fire, and if he is to run into the stables nearby, he will set those on fire. The king's horses will be injured, and everyone knows that monkey fat is the favourite remedy prescribed by vets for burns. The king will not spare us. He will have us all killed for the sake of his horses. This ram's antics are not good for us, and we must leave at once.' He summoned all the monkeys and, explaining this to them, urged them to come away with him to the forest.

But the monkeys only laughed at him. 'You are growing old and clearly losing your mind that you think such foolish thoughts,' they scoffed. 'Why should we leave this comfortable life and give up all the fine food that the prince himself feeds us—for your imaginary fears?'

'You foolish creatures, you do not understand the danger you are in,' exclaimed the chief of the monkeys. 'This happy existence of yours will end in death and destruction. I cannot bear to watch the end of my people. So even though you will not come with me, I must go away.' The monkey chief said goodbye and left for the forest at once.

Some time passed, and then one day, it happened exactly as the chief of the monkeys had foreseen: the ram made his way into the kitchen, one of the cooks picked up a burning piece of wood from the

fire and threw it at the ram; his coat caught fire and, in a desperate attempt to save himself, the ram ran into the stables. The stables were built of wood and full of hay and straw—they caught fire in seconds. The horses were wild with terror, and many of them were badly burnt before the stable hands could rescue them. The poor ram, of course, perished in the flames.

The king was distraught. He summoned the ablest vets in his kingdom and ordered them to heal his horses. The vets put their heads together and said, 'Sire, only an ointment made of monkey fat can heal the burns the horses have suffered.'

At this, the king ordered all the monkeys in his palace and gardens to be rounded up and killed. His men carried out his orders so that not a single monkey was left alive.

Now, the chief of the monkeys, who was at this time living peacefully in the forest, heard of the slaughter. Overwhelmed with grief and anger, he swore that he would avenge his murdered clan. He gave up eating and wandered heart broken through the forest night and day.

One day, he came to a large and beautiful lake covered with lotus flowers. He was about to bend down for a drink when he noticed several sets of footprints leading into the lake, but none coming out. 'Now, that is indeed curious,' he thought to himself. 'There must be some vicious creature in the lake that drags in men and animals and eats them. It is not wise to step into the lake. Instead, I will drink the water from a distance through a hollow lotus stem.'

As the monkey dipped the lotus stem into the water and began to drink, there rose up from the lake a fearsome rakshasa wearing a necklace of blood red rubies around his neck. 'Hey, monkey!' called the rakshasa. 'Anyone who steps into this lake becomes my dinner. You are smart—you did not step in but are using a lotus stem to drink the water. I have never met anyone as clever as you before. I am deeply impressed by your quick thinking—and so, as a mark of my favour, ask of me whatever your heart desires, and I will fulfil your wish.'

Said the monkey, 'How many people can you eat?'

'In the lake, I can eat a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, even a million people if they enter the water; outside the lake, I cannot even swallow a scrawny jackal,' replied the rakshasa.

'Well, I have a score to settle with a certain king,' said the monkey. 'If you lend me this jewelled necklace of yours, I can tempt the king with it and get him and all his family and followers to enter the lake.'

The rakshasa nodded and handed his necklace to the monkey without hesitation. ‘Do as you see fit,’ he said.

The monkey wore the necklace around his neck and, swinging through the trees and over the rooftops, made his way to the king’s palace. The townspeople greeted him with affection and said, ‘O monkey chief, where have you been all these days? We haven’t seen you around. And what a beautiful necklace! Where did you get this? It glitters more brightly than the sun!’

Replied the monkey, ‘Deep in the forest lies a magical pool, put there by Kubera, the god of wealth himself. Anyone who bathes in that pool at dawn is blessed by Kubera, and emerges with just such a necklace of jewels around his throat.’

The news of the monkey and his necklace spread throughout the town. When it reached the ears of the king, he called the monkey to him and asked, ‘O monkey chief, is this tale true? Is there really a magic pool somewhere full of jewelled necklaces?’

The monkey replied, ‘Sire, the ruby necklace around my neck should be proof enough that my story is true. If Your Majesty is in need of such a necklace, send one of your courtiers with me, and I will show him the magic pool.’

‘Well, if this is indeed true, then I myself will come with you, taking with me my entire family and all my followers,’ said the king. ‘If so many of us bathe in the pool, I will be able to collect a great many of the jewelled necklaces.’

‘Very well, sire, I will lead you to the magic pool,’ replied the monkey.

And so, the king, accompanied by his queens, his ministers and his entire household, set off for the magic pool. The king in his palanquin seated the monkey fondly in his lap, and all through the journey, fed him choice and delicious fruit. The monkey gazed at the aging king and his followers, all so eager and driven only by greed. ‘It has been truly said,’ he reflected, ‘that with the passing of the years, beauty, strength, and even the mind, decay; men grow weak and can barely walk; they lose their hearing and their sight—but their greed remains unchanged!’

The monkey, the king and the king’s retinue reached the pool in the forest at dawn. ‘Sire, the sun is about to rise. So ask your followers to jump into the lake all together. Then I will take you to the spot where I had entered the water, so that you may get a necklace as rich and brilliant as mine,’ said the monkey.

The king did as the monkey suggested. As soon as the king’s

household and followers entered the lake, the rakshasa ate them up. The king waited impatiently by the shore, and when his people did not emerge from the lake, he asked the monkey, ‘Why are they taking so long?’

At this, the monkey climbed up the tallest tree, and once he was safely out of the king’s reach called out to him, ‘O king, the rakshasa has eaten all your people. You killed all my people, and, in revenge, I have killed all your family and followers. You were my king and my master, and so I spared you. Go now the way that you had come.’

The king, grief-stricken and helpless, turned around and went back to his palace without a word.

Once the king had left, the rakshasa emerged from the lake and said, ‘That was smartly done! Through your cleverness in drinking water through the lotus stalk you gained me as a friend and destroyed an enemy, and through it all, you did not even lose my ruby necklace! You are a clever monkey!’

‘And that is why I say,’ said Suvarnasiddhi, ‘that men, when they fall prey to greed, act without thinking and find themselves in trouble.’ Completing his tale, Suvarnasiddhi said to his friend, ‘And now, give me leave to return home. Though you are wise and learned, you were foolish to disregard my advice. There is nothing I can do to help you. You alone must bear the consequences of your thoughtless action.’

‘You are right, my friend, I alone must suffer for my deeds,’ said Chakradhara sadly. ‘Go home.’

‘This brings to an end the fifth and last part of your lessons,’ said Vishnusharma.

And thus ends the work known to the world as the *Panchatantra*, a treatise in five parts on the art of living wisely and well, composed by the learned scholar, Vishnusharma.

Translator's Note

The fables of the *Panchatantra* have always been a part of the landscape of my life, and so, when my daughters were born and grew old enough to ask for and listen to bedtime tales, these were amongst the first stories I told them. It was in searching for more *Panchatantra* tales for my daughters that I realized the absence of a translation for children that maintained the structural integrity of the original work.

Now, one of the most interesting features of the *Panchatantra* is its story-within-a-story structure—stories contain stories which contain more stories, somewhat like a Russian *matryoshka* doll that contains doll within doll within doll. However, in every translation and retelling for children that I could find, though the stories had been charmingly retold and often beautifully illustrated, they had been presented as stand-alone tales without the context or 'frame story' within which they occur in the *Panchatantra*. This, I felt, took away from the tales substantially. I therefore decided to translate the *Panchatantra* myself, keeping intact its original form and structure. And so I embarked on this translation, almost twenty years ago today, a labour of love for my daughters, my numerous nieces and nephews, and every child I knew who had ever clamoured for a story.

The translation went much slower than I had expected; the children grew much faster and had soon outgrown these tales. So, for many years, I put this translation aside and became busy writing and translating other books—till a conversation with Sohini Mitra of Puffin India in July 2015 brought me back to it. I looked at the *Panchatantra* again, with different eyes, and realized its true significance: not only was it a masterly treatise on politics and government and a manual for conducting our daily lives with wisdom and common sense, but, devised to educate the three foolish sons of a king in the ways of the world, it was also a revolutionary, and successful, experiment in teaching young people. Where traditional methods had failed with the princes, the fables of the *Panchatantra* succeeded—by teaching them practical wisdom, and by awakening in them curiosity about the world. Within six months, the blockhead princes had become wise and knowledgeable young men. Since then,

says the *Panchatantra* in its preface, its stories have been used to educate young people everywhere—a claim that is borne out by the many translations and retellings of this work that are found all over the world even today.

Storytelling is an ancient tradition in India, and stories, especially those featuring animals that speak, think and behave like humans, have been used since time immemorial for the purposes of teaching and illustrating or explaining a point. Animal stories may be found in works as ancient as the Rig Veda, which, composed sometime between 1700 and 1100 BCE, is one of India's oldest texts, and in the Upanishads, composed only slightly later, in the first millennium BCE. One of the largest collections of such animal stories from ancient India is the Buddhist *Jataka* tales. These fables, composed sometime between 300 BCE and 400 CE, relate episodes from the Buddha's previous lives (in many of which he was born as an animal) and were used to explain and propagate his teachings. The *Panchatantra*, composed in Sanskrit around 300 CE, continued this ancient tradition of using stories to fulfil the heavier and more serious purpose of teaching.

The appeal of the *Panchatantra*, however, is not limited only to the young. Apart from its wonderful stories and ageless wisdom, it is a work that looks at life head-on. Rather than seeking to present linear solutions where good wins over evil, moral behaviour wins over the immoral or even amoral, it acknowledges that life, love and friendship can be complex, that politics, government, and human interactions are not always straightforward, and even right and wrong, truth and falsehood can often be a matter of circumstance, expediency, or what is practical. As a result, the stories resonate with people of all ages, at different levels, in different ways, everywhere. Today there may be found more than 200 versions of the *Panchatantra* across the world, in more than fifty languages. The oldest recension is probably the Sanskrit *Tantrakhyayika* from Kashmir—this predates the *Panchatantra* version available to us today. The most famous retelling of the *Panchatantra* is the thirteenth century version by Narayana, known as the *Hitopdesa*.

The *Panchatantra* was first translated in the sixth century CE, into Pahlavi, at the command of the Sassanian ruler Khusru Anushirwan (531–579 CE) by his physician, Barzoi. This translation is now lost, but was the source for the first Syriac translation of the *Panchatantra* in 570 by the Periodeut Bud. Some two centuries later, Barzoi's Pahlavi version was translated into Arabic by Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa. From

Ibn-al-Muqaffa's translation there also arose further translations including a later Syriac version, as well as translations into Persian, Hebrew, eastern Turki, Greek and several European languages so that the work became well known in both Muslim and Christian literature. In its Arabic translation, it became famous as *Kalila wa Dimna* (after the names of two of the principal characters, the jackals Karataka and Damanaka); in Europe, it became known as the *Fables of Bidpai*. Many of the stories of the *Panchatantra* can be found in the seventeenth century fables of La Fontaine. Their influence can also be seen in the stories of the Arabian Nights, as well as in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. The stories also travelled to Indonesia in both oral and written forms.

We know very little about the author of the *Panchatantra*, except what the introduction to the work itself tells us—that his name was Vishnusharma, that he was a brahmin, exceptionally learned, a renowned teacher, and eighty years of age at the time he composed this work. Since we have no other evidence regarding Vishnusharma, it is difficult to say whether he really was the author of the *Panchatantra* or himself a fictional character, invented as a literary device for the purpose of narrating the stories.

My translation is based primarily on the original Sanskrit text as presented by M.R. Kale,* and on the Sanskrit text with Sanskrit and Hindi commentary as presented by Shyamacharan Pande.† I have also included four additional stories—which I have retold—from the 1199 Purnabhadra recension, as translated by Arthur William Ryder.‡ I have remained as faithful as possible to the spirit of the original work, but have consciously and purposely stepped away from a literal, line by line, translation of the text. Given that the primary purpose of the *Panchatantra* is instructional, the lesson derived from a particular story is repeated over and over again. Though these repetitions are creatively framed—in different words, and explained through diverse examples—they do become tedious for a modern audience. I have therefore left out many of these repetitions, with a view to making the text crisper and lighter to read.

The world of the *Panchatantra* is the world of men, and the image of women in its stories is at best prejudiced and at worst exceedingly misogynistic and repressive. Women, unless married and tied down with home and children, are regarded as destructive, dangerous and untrustworthy. Thus, the virtue that is most greatly valued in a woman is obedience—to her father, her husband, her son. There are very few stories in the *Panchatantra* where female characters play a

major role, and only in two of these do they play a positive role: in both these stories (The Story of the Crow and the Cobra and The Story of the Tittibh Bird and the Sea, both in Part 1), the mother bird is worried about the welfare of her children. In The Story of the Monkey and the Crocodile, the frame story of Part 4, the crocodile's wife is evil, jealous and scheming, seeking to eat her husband's best friend and end their friendship—she has every evil quality that the *Panchatantra* warns us about in women. A woman is truly valued when she becomes a mother; otherwise, even as a wife, she is a threat to men. Though I have retained these particular stories in my translation, I mention them here so that my young readers may become aware of and stay alert to these representations. I have, however, taken the liberty to leave out the more overtly misogynistic tales from my translation—fortunately, these were few in number and leaving them out did not compromise the integrity or structure of the work as a whole.

This translation has been two decades in the making. My deepest thanks, therefore, to Sohini Mitra, who saw it to publication, and to Mriga Maithel, for her suggestions and patient and meticulous editing.

My gratitude, too, to my daughters, whose demands for bedtime tales first made me turn to the *Panchatantra*, and who have, over the years, remained patient listeners to my outpourings on this work. I have, at odd times, pestered them to read the stories, even to illustrate some of them. They have borne all my demands with unfailing patience and good humour, sometimes even agreeing, in recent years, to be prodded awake at night to listen to a particularly amusing or complex tale that could not wait till the morning to be told.

My daughters, and my nieces and nephews, and all the other children in my life for whom I began this book have grown up now—to these young women and young men, in thanks for all the joy they have given and continue to give me, I dedicate this endeavour of mine.

Kolkata

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AUTHOR FILE

Who Wrote the Panchatantra?

In its opening story, the *Panchatantra* identifies as its author the brahmin Vishnusharma, an eminent scholar in the court of Amarashakti, the king of Mahilaropya, the city in and around which most of the stories of the *Panchatantra* are set. He is renowned far and wide for his learning and his skill as a teacher, and is therefore given the task of educating the three dull-witted sons of the king and making them fit to rule. Vishnusharma, who is eighty years old at the time, accepts the challenge, and for the purposes of teaching the princes the rules of kingship and the principles of government, he devises the stories of the *Panchatantra*. Since we have no other information from any other independent source, it is impossible to say whether Vishnusharma was a real, historical person or is himself a literary invention for the purpose of the stories.

Regardless of the author's real identity, it is clear that he was well versed in politics and the rules of government and kingship, and had either been involved in, or had observed very closely, the workings of royal courts. He was also clearly very learned, with more than a passing familiarity with ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as is evidenced by the numerous references in the *Panchatantra* to these works. Given the ideas and principles contained in the stories, scholars believe that he was familiar with contemporary literature on politics and government, and had definitely studied Kautilya's political–economic treatise, the *Arthashastra*, in some detail. The stories show that the author of the *Panchatantra* was also a keen observer of human relationships and human interactions. Though he always endorses the values of truth and honour, he is also a realist, and is aware that sometimes the practical demands of life and government create situations where compromise becomes inevitable.

It is most likely that he composed the work in Sanskrit, which was the literary as well as the spoken language of the learned in ancient India.

Some versions of the *Panchatantra*—from southern India and south-east Asia—give the author's name as Vasubhaga. Again, there is not enough evidence to confirm his identity or his existence.

ALL ABOUT THE *PANCHATANTRA*

When Was the Panchatantra *Composed?*

Scholars trace some of the tales of the *Panchatantra* to as far back as 1500 BCE—to the ancient Sanskrit text, the Rig Veda, and it is likely that many of its tales were known even earlier. The exact date of its composition is uncertain. We do know, however, that it was translated into Pahlavi in 550 CE. Thus, we know with certainty that the *Panchatantra* must have been composed before this date—though it is difficult to say exactly how much earlier. Today most scholars agree that it was probably composed around 300 CE.

Where Was the Panchatantra *Composed?*

Most of the stories of the *Panchatantra* are set in or around the city of Mahilaropya. We do not know the exact location of this city, or even if it was a real place (the meaning of its name is also unclear—it could mean 'a city as beautiful as a woman', or more probably, 'the city of beautiful women'). The *Panchatantra* only states, rather vaguely, that Mahilaropya was the capital city of 'a kingdom in the south'. It would therefore seem logical to conclude that the work was composed in southern India. But scholars disagree. Though some do maintain that it was composed in southern India, others give the north as its location of origin.

The Structure of the Panchatantra

The original *Panchatantra* is a mixture of verse and prose. The stories are narrated mainly in prose, but the lessons derived from the tales are usually given in verse form.

The works consists of five parts (hence the name *Panchatantra*: *pancha*, meaning five, and *tantra*, meaning part), each of which deals with a particular aspect of kingship, government, life and living. The longest is the first part, accounting for almost half the stories.

A distinguishing feature of the *Panchatantra* is its 'story within a

story' structure—individual stories are placed within other stories, and each individual part or tantra replicates the structure of the work as a whole. So the *Panchatantra* takes its audience into a series of stories, deeper and deeper, from one level to the next. Let us see how this structure works:

Level 1
The very first enclosing story is the entire *Panchatantra* itself, which is being told by a narrator we do not know or see, and which is being heard (or read) by all listeners (including us), everywhere.

Level 2
The Prologue, the story of the king and his three sons, and which explains why the *Panchatantra* was composed; here, too, the narrator remains anonymous and the listeners are still all of us. The Prologue encloses the five parts of the *Panchatantra*.

Level 3
Each individual part or tantra begins with its own particular frame story. For instance Part 1 begins with 'The Story of Sanjivaka the Bull and Pingalaka the Lion', Part 2 with 'The Story of the Crow, the Mouse, the Turtle and the Deer', and so on. The frame story of each part is our third level of story. The narrator is now Vishnusharma, and his listeners are the three princes.

Level 4
Within the frame story of each part are contained the stories in that part, which may contain more stories, some of which may contain even more stories. These form successive levels of story. So, for instance, in Part 1, Level 4 would be 'The Story of the Crow and the Cobra'. The narrator is now Damanaka the jackal, and his listener is his friend and companion, Karataka. Similarly, in Part 2, 'The Story of the Mouse and the Mendicant' would be at Level 4. Here, the narrator is the mouse, Hiranyaka, and the listeners are his friends, Laghupatanaka the crow and Mantharaka the turtle.

Levels 5 and 6
Within some of the level 4 stories are contained further stories, which become the next level of stories: for example, in Part 1, 'The Story of the Heron and the Crab' (the narrator here is a jackal, and the listeners are his friends, a pair of crows), and in Part 2, 'The Story of the Brahmin's Wife and the Sesame Seeds' (the narrator

now is the ascetic Brihadsphik, and the listener is his friend, the mendicant Tamrachuda). In Part 2 we also find stories at the next level—for example, ‘The Story of the Huntsman, the Boar and the Jackal’ (the narrator is a brahmin, the listener is his wife).

The Table of Contents indicates this structure.

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Translations and Retellings

The *Panchatantra* as we know it is regarded by most scholars to have been composed around 300 CE. The Sanskrit Kashmiri recension (revised edition of a text) called the *Tantrakhyayika* predates the version of the *Panchatantra* available to us today. The subject matter of the *Panchatantra* and its delightful tales made it a very popular text. Its stories, carried far and wide by travellers and merchants, spread rapidly across the world, and the text was translated again and again into various languages through the centuries. Today, there exist more than 200 translations and retellings of the *Panchatantra* in fifty languages around the world. Here then, is a list of some of the more important translations and retellings:

- ***By Barzoi into Pahlavi, 550 CE***
  The *Panchatantra* was first translated in 550 CE into Pahlavi, at the command of the Sassanian ruler Khusru I (531–579 CE) of Persia. He was known as 'Anushirwan' or 'he of the immortal soul', and is famous for his encouragement of art and literature. He sent his physician Barzoi to India to procure books on government and kingship, in particular, the *Panchatantra*. Barzoi translated the *Panchatantra* from Sanskrit into Pahlavi and included in it, in appendix form, stories from other Indian sources, including the Mahabharata. This Pahlavi translation is lost.

- ***By the Periodeut Bud into Syriac, 570 CE***
  Barzoi's Pahlavi translation was the source for the first Syriac translation of the *Panchatantra* in 570 CE by the Periodeut Bud. Known as *Kalilag and Damnag* (after two of the principal characters, the jackals Karataka and Damanaka), this translation survives in manuscript form.

- ***By Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa into Arabic, 750 CE***

Based on Barzoi's Pahlavi translation, Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation, *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, was literary and stylistic. Like the Syriac translation, this translation too was named after the jackals Karataka and Damanaka.

The book was written mainly for the instruction of civil servants, but its stories became extremely popular and were retold again and again so that his original wording changed considerably over time. The stories became a part of the folklore of the Islamic world, and the work was carried by the Arabs to Spain. There, it was translated into Old Castilian in 1252 as *Calila e Dimna*.

Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation was put into verse in Arabic three times:

- by Ibn al-Muqaffa's contemporary, al-Laqiki; this version has been lost.
- by Ibn al-Habbariya in 1100; this was based on both Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation and al-Laqiki's verse rendition.
- by Abd al-Mumin, completed on 15 November 1242.

The *Kalilah wa Dimnah* led to many other versions, including a second Syriac version by a Syriac priest—this translation had Christian overtones.

The Persian poet Rudhaki (died 916 CE) translated it into Persian in verse form as *Kalileh o Demneh*. Only sixteen of his verses survive today.

The *Kalilah wa Dimnah* was also a source of inspiration for artists, and there exist many illustrated manuscripts from Persia. It was also translated twice into Eastern Turki, and into old Ottoman Turkish, Ethiopic and Malay. In 1080, it was translated into Greek, as the *Stephanites kai Ichnelates*.

In the twelfth century, it was translated into Hebrew by the Rabbi Joel; this was translated into Latin by John of Capua as *Directorium Humanae Vitae* (*Directory of Human Life*). The Latin translation was printed in 1480, and became the source of most later European versions. A German translation was printed in 1483, making it one of the first books to be printed by Johannes Gutenberg after the Bible.

The Latin version was also translated into Italian, by Anton Francesco Doni in 1552. This became the source for the first English translation, in 1570, by Sir Thomas North, as *The Fables of Bidpai*.

Some of the stories of the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* can be found in the seventeenth-century fables of the French writer La Fontaine and in the nineteenth-century collection of folk and fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm.

- ***By Kashifi into Persian, 1504***
  Kashifi translated Ibn al-Muqaffa's version into Persian in 1504, in a style that was more ornate. His version met with instant popularity. He called it *Anwar-i Suhayli* in honour of a minister in the king's court.

  In 1836, the *Anwar-i Suhayli* was printed in England, as a textbook for teaching Persian to the officials of the East India Company in India.

  From this, it was translated into several Indian languages, thus bringing the wheel full circle. The stories also travelled to Indonesia in both oral and written forms.

  In India, the *Hitopdesa* (*Good Advice*) was composed by Narayana in the thirteenth century and circulated mostly in Bengal. It appears to be an independent retelling of the *Panchatantra*.

The *Panchatantra* continues to be translated and retold in modern times.

Other Collections of Fables from Around the World

1. **The *Jataka* Tales (Pali)**
   Consisting of some 550 tales, this is one of the largest collections of fables from ancient India. The tales are part of the canonical literature of Buddhism, and speak of the previous incarnations of the Buddha, in many of which he took the form of an animal. These tales were composed and collected in the period between 300 BCE and 400 CE.

2. **Aesop's Fables (Greek)**
   Aesop is the supposed author of a collection of animal fables. His stories, like the *Panchatantra*, teach shrewdness and worldly wisdom.

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Aesop lived during the sixth century BCE and was probably a slave on the island of Samos. It is said that Aesop was ugly and deformed, and those who came to listen to his tales laughed as much at him as at his stories. Though no historical information on Aesop is available, he was probably a real person. In later times, his name became synonymous with 'fable' and many tales not composed by him were nevertheless attributed to him.

3. **The Fables of Phaedrus (Latin)**
Phaedrus (c. 15 BCE–50 CE) lived in ancient Rome and was the first person to translate into Latin and put into verse whole books of the Greek prose fables then in circulation and attributed to Aesop.

Phaedrus was a slave by birth. He went to Rome early in life and became a freedman in the household of the Emperor Augustus. Phaedrus was familiar with the works of Greek and Roman writers. Though others before him had rendered fables into verse and used them in their work, Phaedrus considered himself a pioneering artist, and believed his poems would give him immortal fame. His fables include favourites such as The Fox and the Grapes and The Wolf and the Lamb.

Phaedrus became extremely popular in Europe during the Middle Ages.

4. **The Fables of La Fontaine (French)**
Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695) was a French poet, but is remembered mainly for his *Fables*, a work which is considered to be one of the masterpieces of French literature.

La Fontaine based his fables mainly on Aesop, but also used the Latin verse translations by Phaedrus. More than a dozen of his fables are drawn from the *Panchatantra*. He enriched the original tales considerably by adding deft touches of drama or humour to the stories. He wrote his fables in verse, and set them mainly in the countryside. Sometimes he turned to satire and sometimes he commented on contemporary political issues through his stories, but he did so lightly and with humour. The main

theme of his tales, however, remains that of the traditional fable: the everyday moral issues of mankind.

Characters in the Panchatantra

Most of the characters of the *Panchatantra* are animals that behave, think and speak like humans. In every culture across the world, people have given human characteristics to animals. But the qualities that people see in particular animals vary across cultures. Thus, an owl is considered wise in England, but evil and unlucky in India. The animals of the *Panchatantra* conform to the ideas held about them in Indian culture. So, a heron is regarded as deceitful and cruel, for he stands still for hours on one leg pretending to be an ascetic doing penance when we all know that he is actually waiting to grab the next unwary fish that swims too close. Similarly, an elephant is noble and proud, a jackal is greedy and cunning, and a lion, though the king of the animals, is arrogant and often easily fooled by a weaker, more intelligent animal. An ox is loyal, a dog is unclean and greedy, and a cobra dangerous and untrustworthy. The audience for which the stories of the *Panchatantra* were meant would have known these qualities of particular animals, and so would have known instantly what to expect of them in the stories.

The author of the *Panchatantra* has used one more device to make it easy for his audience to understand the nature of his characters, and that is their names. He has given his characters, whether human or animal, names that highlight certain aspects of their appearance or behaviour, or give insights into their nature. Thus, we have Pingalaka the lion, whose name means ‘one who is red–gold’, named for his fiery coat; Dantila the jeweller whose name means ‘one who has big and projecting teeth’ and immediately gives us a vivid image of the man; Chaturaka the wily jackal whose name means ‘one who is sly and cunning’; and Agnimukha the bedbug, whose name means ‘fire-mouth’ and almost makes us go ‘ouch’ as we imagine his bite!

Here then, in alphabetical order, are the characters in each book of the *Panchatantra*, and the meanings of their names:

PROLOGUE

Amarashakti — King of Mahilaropya, whose request to Vishnusharma to educate his sons led to the composition of the *Panchatantra*.

	His name means ‘of eternal might, or as mighty as the gods’.
Anantashakti	Son of King Amarashakti. His name means ‘of boundless might’.
Bahushakti	Son of King Amarashakti. His name means of great might.
Sumati	Minister to King Amarashakti. His name means ‘good sense’.
Ugrashakti	Son of King Amarashakti. His name means ‘of fierce might’.
Vishnusharma	The brahmin scholar and teacher who is widely regarded as the author of the *Panchatantra*. His name means ‘one whose joy or refuge is Lord Vishnu’.

PART 1: THE FALLING OUT OF FRIENDS

Agnimukha	A bedbug. His name means ‘fire mouth’.
Anagatvidhata	A fish. His name means ‘one who arranges or plans the future’.
Ashadhbhuti	A thief. The meaning of his name is unclear. Its literal meaning is ‘one born in the month of Ashadh’. *Ashadh* is the fourth month of the Hindu calendar, and corresponds to July–August. It could also refer to the planet Mars, which is known as Ashadhbhuta, and taken to mean ‘he who is born under the influence of Mars’.
Bhasuraka	A lion. His name means ‘the terrible’.
Chandarava	A jackal who fell into a vat of indigo dye. His name means ‘furious clamour’ or ‘loud din’.
Chaturaka	A wily jackal, follower of the lion Vajradanstra. His name means ‘one who is sly and cunning’.
Damanaka	A jackal in the train of Pingalaka the lion. His name means ‘one who conquers or subdues’.
Dantila	A wealthy jeweller and governor

	of the city of Bardhaman. His name means ‘toothy’, or ‘one who has big and projecting teeth’.
Devasharma	An ascetic. His name means ‘one whose joy or refuge are the gods’.
Dharmabuddhi	A merchant, friend of Papabuddhi. His name means ‘one of righteous mind’.
Gomayu	A jackal.
Gorambha	A poor man who worked in the royal palace of the king of Bardhaman. His name means ‘the lowing of cattle or the bellow of a bull’.
Jirnadhan	A merchant. His name means ‘one whose wealth has decayed’.
Kakud-druma	The false name taken by Chandarava, the jackal. The name is made up of two words: *kakud*, which means ‘a symbol of royalty’, and *druma*, which means ‘a tree growing in paradise’.
Kambugriva	A turtle who didn’t know when to stop talking. Her name means ‘one who has a neck marked like a shell’.
Karataka	A jackal in the train of Pingalaka the lion, and sidekick to Damanaka. The exact meaning of his name is unclear—its literal meaning is a crow. Crows are regarded as being wise and cautious, and since his personality is supposed to be in contrast to the aggressive and scheming Damanaka, his name may be taken to signify ‘one who is prudent or cautious’.
Kathanaka	A camel. The literal meaning of his name is a storyteller, but in this context it could perhaps mean ‘someone about whom stories are told’, or ‘about whom people talk and gossip’.

Kirata	A tribe of robbers, who would rob their victims and then kill them.
Kravyamukha	A wolf, follower of the lion Vajradanstra. His name means ‘carrion mouth’, or ‘one who eats raw flesh’.
Madarakta	A wild goose. His name means ‘red with love’, or ‘mad with love’.
Madotkata	A lion. His name means ‘furious’ or ‘arrogant’.
Mandavisarpini	A little white louse who lived amongst the king’s bedclothes. Her name means ‘one who moves slowly’.
Meghanada	A frog. His name means ‘the rumbling or thundering of clouds’.
Nandaka	A bull belonging to the merchant Vardhamana. His name means ‘one who is joyous or happy’.
Papabuddhi	A merchant, friend of Dharmabuddhi. His name means ‘one with a wicked mind’.
Pingalaka	A lion. His name means ‘one who is red–gold or the colour of fire’.
Pratyutpanmati	A fish. His name means ‘one who is quick-thinking’, or ‘one who has presence of mind’.
Sanjivaka	A bull belonging to the merchant Vardhamana. His name means ‘one who is animated or lively’.
Sankata	A swan, friend to the turtle Kambugriva. Her name means ‘narrow’ or ‘slim’.
Shankukarna	A young camel, under the protection of the lion Vajradanstra. His name means ‘the one with spiky ears’.
Suchimukha	A tailorbird. His name means ‘needle-faced’.
Vajradanstra	A lion. His name means ‘one whose fangs are as hard as the rock adamant’.

Vardhamana A merchant. His name means ‘prosperous’.

Vikata A swan, friend to the turtle Kambugriva. Her name means ‘large’ or ‘fat’.

Vinarava A fly. Her name means ‘one with a voice like the *vina*, an ancient, Indian, multi-stringed musical instrument’.

Yadbhavishya A fish. His name means ‘one who says, “what will be will be”’, or ‘one who believes in and relies on the power of fate’.

Yagyadatta A poor man. His name means ‘one who has been given by or at a sacrifice’.

PART 2: THE GAINING OF FRIENDS

Brihatsphik An ascetic, and a friend of Tamrachuda. His name means ‘one who has a large bottom’.

Chitragriva King of the pigeons. His name means ‘one who has a bright or speckled neck’.

Chitranga A deer. His name means ‘one who has a spotted or bright body’.

Guptadhana A miserly merchant who lived in the city of Bardhaman. His name means ‘secret or hidden wealth’.

Hiranyaka A mouse. His name means ‘one who is the colour of gold’.

Karman A strange and fearsome being that Somilaka the weaver overheard in the forest in conversation with Karta. The name means ‘an act or a deed that has been done’.

Karta A strange and fearsome being that Somilaka the weaver overheard in the forest in conversation with Karman. The name means ‘doer’.

Laghupatanaka A crow. His name means ‘light-winged’ or ‘swift-flying’.

Mantharaka A turtle. His name means ‘one who moves slowly’.

Somilaka A weaver.

Tamrachuda A mendicant. His name means ‘one with a coppery red topknot’.

Upabhuktadhana A profligate merchant who lived in the city of Bardhaman. His name means ‘wealth that is enjoyed’.

PART 3: OF CROWS AND OWLS

Anujivi A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means ‘one who lives dependent on another’, or ‘follower’.

Arimardana King of the owls. His name means ‘the crusher of foes’, or ‘the destroyer of enemies’.

Chaturadanta An elephant chief. His name means ‘the one who has four tusks’.

Chiranjivi A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means ‘one who lives forever’.

Chitraratha A king, owner of the lake of lotuses. His name means ‘one with a bright chariot’.

Dadhipuchchha A jackal. The literal meaning of his name is ‘one with a curd tail’, which most probably refers to the white colour of his tail; thus, his name can be taken to mean ‘the one with a tail as white as curd’.

Devashakti A king. His name means ‘divine strength’.

Diptaksha An owl, minister to the owl king Arimardana. His name means ‘one with blazing eyes’.

Drona A poor brahmin. His name means ‘a wooden vessel or trough’.

Haridatta A poor brahmin. His name means ‘the gift of the god, Hari’.

Hemvarna A golden bird. His name means ‘gold-coloured’.

Jalapada A great big frog, chief of the frogs in his pond. His name means ‘one

with webbed feet'.

Kapinjala A sparrow. His name means 'yellow or gold-coloured'.

Kharanakhara A lion. His name means 'sharp claw'.

Krikalika A bird who works as a spy for the owls. The word means 'partridge', but it is not clear in the story whether this is used as a proper name for the character, or as a general name to indicate the kind of bird.

Krurakarma A thief. His name means 'cruel actions', or 'evil deeds'.

Kruraksha An owl, minister to the owl king Arimardana. His name means 'one with cruel eyes'.

Lambakarna A clever rabbit. His name means 'one with long ears'.

Mandavisha A wily old snake. His name means 'one with weak venom'.

Meghavarna King of the crows. His name means 'cloud-coloured', or 'dark like the rain clouds'.

Mitrasharma A brahmin. His name means 'the joy or delight of friends'.

Prajivi A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means 'one who lives independent of any other'.

Prakarakarna An owl, minister to the owl king Arimardana. His name means 'one with ears like ramparts'.

Raktaksha An owl, the only wise minister of the owl king Arimardana. His name means 'one with red eyes'.

Sanjivi A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means 'one who restores the dead to life'.

Satyavachan A *pishach* (a fierce and malignant spirit, said to haunt cremation grounds and graveyards). His name means 'true statement', or 'truth-speaking'.

Sindhuka A magical bird whose droppings

	would turn to gold as soon as they touched the ground. The meaning of his name is not certain—it could refer to the shrub *Vitex negundo*, known as *sambhalu* in Hindi, the leaves of which are used for medicinal purposes, or it could mean 'born of the ocean'.
Sthirajivi	A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means 'one who lives a long life'.
Tikshadanta	A cat. His name means 'sharp-toothed'.
Ujjivi	A crow, minister to Meghavarna. His name means 'one who can come to life again'.
Vakranasa	An owl, minister to the owl king Arimardana. His name means 'one with a curved or crooked beak'.
Vijayadatta	King of the rabbits who lives on the moon. His name means 'one who is the gift of victory'.
Yagyavalkya	A rishi, chief of a hermitage on the banks of the river Ganga.

PART 4: THE LOSS OF GAINS

Chitranga	A dog. His name means 'one with a spotted or dappled body'.
Dhusara	A jackal, follower of the lion Karalakesara. His name means 'grey', or 'of a dusty-white colour'.
Gangadatta	King of the frogs. His name means 'the gift of the river Ganga'.
Karalakesara	A lion. His name means 'one with a formidable or large mane'.
Karalamukha	A crocodile. His name means 'one who has a terrifying face with formidable and protruding teeth'.
Lambakarna	A foolish donkey. His name means 'one with long ears'.
Mahachaturaka	A very clever jackal. His name

	means ‘one who is extremely cunning or shrewd’.
Priyadarshana	A big, black serpent. His name means ‘pleasing to the sight’, or ‘handsome’.
Raktamukha	A monkey. His name means ‘red-face’.
Shuddhapata	A washerman. His name means ‘clean clothes’.
Ujjwalaka	A chariot-maker. His name means ‘a simple and respectable man’.
Yamunadatta	A frog, son of Gangadatta, king of the frogs. His name means ‘gift of the river Yamuna’.
Yudhishthira	A potter. His name means ‘one who is firm in battle’. It is also the name of the eldest of the Pandava princes in the Mahabharata, the personification of righteousness and the one who never told a lie.

PART 5: UNCONSIDERED ACTIONS

Bhairavananda	A yogi. His name means ‘one who finds bliss in Lord Bhairava’.
Chakradhara	The man with the wheel upon his head. His name means ‘one who bears a wheel’.
Chandra	A king. His name means ‘the moon’.
Devasharma	A brahmin. His name means ‘one whose joy or refuge is the gods’.
Ekabuddhi	A frog. Literally, ‘one knowledge’, his name can be interpreted to mean one who has limited intelligence or understanding.
Manibhadra	A merchant. His name means ‘excellent or precious jewels’.
Mantharaka	A weaver. His name means ‘one who moves slowly’.
Padmanidhi	A Jain monk about whom the merchant Manibhadra had a dream. His name refers to one of the nine treasures belonging to

	Kubera, the god of wealth.
Sahastrabuddhi	A clever fish. Literally, ‘thousand knowledge’, his name can be interpreted to mean one who is extremely clever and learned.
Shatabuddhi	A clever fish. Literally, ‘hundred knowledge’, or one who is clever and learned.
Somasharma	The name of the imaginary son of the miserly brahmin. His name means ‘one whose joy is the moon’.
Subuddhi	One of four friends. His name means ‘one who has good sense, or is wise’.
Suvarnasiddhi	One of the four friends, who found a mine of gold. His name means ‘he who has found gold’.
Uddhata	A donkey. His name means ‘one who is rude and conceited’.

* You can find the illustration at: http://www.muslimheritage.com/uploads/Kalila-wa-Dimna_7a.jpg

* M.R. Kale, trans. and ed., *Pancatantra of Visṇuśarman*, second edition (Varanasi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1969).
† Shyamacharan Pande, trans. and ed., *Panchatantram*, first edition (Varanasi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1975).
‡ Arthur William Ryder, trans., *Panchatantra*, sixth impression (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1955). The four additional tales that I have included in my translation are: The Story of the Tiger, the Monkey, the Snake and the Man; The Story of the Wild Goose and the Owl; and The Story of the Wild Geese and the Bird Catcher, in Part 1; and The Story of the Elephants and the Mice in Part 2.

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